



All Theses and Dissertations

2015-10-01

Exploring LDS Missionary Blogs: How Culture Manifests in Self-Narratives of Foreign Missionaries

Karina Marie Gathu

Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Gathu, Karina Marie, "Exploring LDS Missionary Blogs: How Culture Manifests in Self-Narratives of Foreign Missionaries" (2015).
All Theses and Dissertations. 5690.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5690>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Exploring LDS Missionary Blogs: How Culture

Manifests in Self-Narratives of

Foreign Missionaries

Karina Marie Gathu

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Sherry Baker, Chair
Clark Callahan
Mark Callister

School of Communications

Brigham Young University

October 2015

Copyright © 2015 Karina Marie Gathu

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Exploring LDS Missionary Blogs: How Culture Manifests in Self-Narratives of Foreign Missionaries

Karina Marie Gathu
School of Communications, BYU
Master of Arts

Missionaries serving in foreign countries provide a unique perspective on culture that they chronicle on public blogs. A content analysis of these blogs showed that missionaries use their own cultural and religious frame to make observations, some good and some bad, about cultural habits and beliefs foreign to their own. Through the medium of blogging, we see how missionaries use self-narratives to understand and make sense out of differences in culture and beliefs that ultimately impact how they identify themselves.

Keywords: blogging, self-narratives, religion, missionaries, LDS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the constant and continual support of my husband, Solomon, who never understood what I was obsessing about, but still supported me every step of the way. I would also like to thank Dr. Sherry Baker, who was the sole reason for me completing this study and getting anything accomplished at all. Without her help and constant support, there would be nothing.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter One: Literature Review	1
Introduction	1
Identity Framing and Culture	3
Symbolic Interaction	8
Identity Formation and Religion	9
The Platform of Blogging	12
Blogging and Identity	16
Chapter Two: Methodology	19
Chapter Three: Findings	27
Weather	28
Cultural Values and Habits	31
Holidays and Celebrations	41
Food	44
Language	50
Other Observations	54
Basic Necessities	63
Transportation	65
Religion	69
Missionary Work: Finding, Teaching, Serving	75
Chapter Four: Discussion and Conclusion.....	81
Conclusion	81
Suggestions for Future Research	86
References	88
Appendices	92
Appendix A	92
Appendix B	93

Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction

There are thousands of missionaries throughout the world who have left their homes and made a commitment to go to another country or location to teach the principles of their beliefs. In this action, they have chosen to immerse themselves in the culture and elements of their new environment in order to have a better understanding of the people and the place they are now inhabiting. Part of this missionary process is chronicling their experiences, thoughts and fears to friends and family who are not with them. A common way for the missionaries to have a record of what they are experiencing and also to share their faith is through a blog. This blog is maintained by them or their family members. Through this blog they detail their time as missionaries and relate to their families and the outside world that which exemplifies their faith and purpose for becoming missionaries. As a result, the blogs are not only a diary of who went where or what they did. They are testimonies of faith, transcripts of belief, and artifacts of thoughts.

One element of cultural studies is to explore identity framing and how individuals relate or connect to the environments that are around them, both in the real world and in the virtual world. Identity theory explores the ways in which people frame their identities and what factors play a prominent role in this identity framing. In this study, I look at the ways missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) frame their cultural experiences as missionaries in foreign countries through the format of missionary blogs.

It is a common practice of LDS missionaries to keep a diary, or journal-like blog about their experiences as proselyting missionaries for the church. The average range of ages of these

missionaries is from 18-20s, and blogs provide a way for the missionaries to connect to their friends and family members “back home.” The LDS Church states that there are around 80,000 missionaries currently serving (www.mormonnewsroom.com/factsandstats). According to the blog index I found on the website Prepare to Serve, there are at least 10,000 active LDS missionary blogs. In order to focus on the experiences of one group of missionaries, I will focus only on the blogs of international missionaries, or missionaries who are serving in a country outside of their own. When looking at the blogs, one can see the ways in which the missionary talks about himself or herself, the experiences as a missionary, the essential beliefs that they hold and their thoughts and reflections about their environments. As they have picked the medium of a blog to share these personal reflections and experiences, these blogs can be categorized and relate to areas of scholarship, such as conversion narratives, or the community of blogging. As Dumaing, David, and Dealwis (2011) state, “conversion narratives in the form of testimony are powerful means of consolidating and strengthening one’s new religious identity.” This demonstrates that as we explore the blogs of these LDS missionaries, we can see from their conversion narratives how their religious identity has been portrayed, and whether it has altered as a result of their missionary service. Further, Taricani (2007) explores blogs as extensions of our identities. She discusses how most blogs are a personal journal type of entry which deals with the experiences and reflections of the blogger. She also notes that the concept we have of ourselves is derived from the connection or association we have with a particular blog and is deepened by the dialog used, which helps us to connect.

Exploring the narratives presented in the blogs of these LDS missionaries will provide insight into their personal conversion narratives, and better understand the experiences and roles of religious missionaries around the world. The purpose of this research is to analyze various

LDS Missionary blogs for patterns that can be found among the discourse by the missionaries, the ways in which foreign missionaries portray their experiences in a foreign country, and ultimately, how the narrative of the missionary reflects his or her cultural interactions and perceptions.

We also need to understand how blogs relate to religion and religious identity. Cheong, Halavais, and Kwon (2008) analyze the content of 200 blogs that mention topics about Christianity. These authors further assert that while “blogs have emerged as a popular genre of online communication and have been utilized for religious expression... There has been scarce attention paid to understanding emergent blogging practices, particularly blogging as a religious practice.” This points out that there is little to no scholarship available that explores missionary blogs. This study of LDS missionary blogs will help to provide a starting point for future scholarship and comparisons with other missionary blogs, that are not only written by LDS missionaries, but from other religions and faiths, as well.

Identity Framing and Culture

Mendoza, Halualani, and Drzewiecka (2002) explore the various theories of identity, including addressing intercultural identity and intercultural communication in the context of self and cultural identity. They first discuss the idea that while conclusions have been made about cultural, religious, and ethnic identities, and it is easy to make generalizations of certain groups based on studies of identity of any of these aspects, identity is an ever-changing concept that is subject not only to social and political constraints, but changing mentalities over periods of time. Essentially, the authors conclude that “the successful achievement of an ‘identity’ within the shaping power of ideology (whether cultural, religious, or political) or of any disciplinary regime can never serve as a final guarantee of victory.” This idea is important to help realize the various

aspects of identity, and how identity can be defined, in particular, while being connected to culture, religion, and other elements that make up an individual.

Nair-Venugopal (2009) further explores the ways in which intercultural identity can be shown in multicultural places. The author explores these ideas in the context of the multicultural Malaysia. She proceeds to explore ideas about culture, identity, and multiculturalism through a study based on surveys administered, interviews conducted, and other data, such as online chats and audio recorded speech. She takes all of these components to analyze what is important to Malaysians when identifying culture, the role of ethnicity, nationality, and religion in this identification, and how this affects their interactions with each other. In another conversation that Nair-Venugopal explores, she observes that some ethnicities are automatically assigned a religious identity, which is important to some, and irrelevant to others. For some of the participants, religious identity is more crucial than national identity. These participants identified first with their religious identity, and second with their national identity. In turn, the opposite is also true. Individuals who do not have religion as a prominent part of their lives feel that national identity is more important than their religious identity. The author also explores ways of speaking by looking at chats conducted by intercultural and interethnic subjects. Nair-Venugopal observes that certain vocabulary and dialogue reflect certain ethnicities or background. This is relevant to the examination of the missionary blogs of missionaries in foreign countries. Examining the language and vocabulary used can show whether the missionary is changing or has adapted to the culture that is foreign to him or her.

Another element of bicultural identity, or how immigrant perceptions define identity is discussed in the article by De Korne, H., Byram, and Fleming (2007). This article discusses bicultural identity and how individuals with multicultural backgrounds are identified, through

self-identification as well as through peer identification. A study was conducted by interviewing immigrants to the US and UK in order to explore how these immigrants identify themselves and aspects of their biculturalism. There are different social, political, and religious categories peers use to identify individuals. However, most immigrants, or those who have crossed cultural boundaries will say that they identify with both cultures and none at the same time. This is not a bad thing in their estimation. Those who participated in the study emphasized the desire to focus on the good from each cultural background and merge them together. As discussed by the authors: “By promoting a certain culture it has the implication of rating a culture...” Despite the subjects’ willingness to become bicultural, there is always a period of adjustment. While each participant has different issues and experiences related to their adaption to their new culture, each also has distinct ideas about how to identify themselves. While these ideas may not be the same across different individuals, the overall attitude is the same. The individuals in the study did not choose to promote or rank a certain culture higher than the other. As immigrants, they valued both their native culture and their current culture.

Holliday (2010) explores the ways in which his subjects from different nationalities and ethnicities determine the relationship between cultural identity and nation. He uses 28 subjects who have different nationalities and ethnicities. The author presented two questions in an email format to the subjects who came from a variety of countries and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the subjects were expatriates. All of the subjects had experiences living in places other than their country of origin. While the author was seeking to understand how various subjects identify themselves, in particular to the nation they may use to define their culture, he was forced to come to the conclusion that nation was not really a factor for cultural identity per the responses of his subjects. He also concluded that almost no generalizations about a particular region or ethnic

group could be determined. On the other hand, the author did gather and cite many discussions about cultural identity, how the subjects did not want to be defined by one particular nation, religion, or language, and yet how individually each referenced most, if not all of these elements to create their own cultural identity. This mindset helped the author to conclude that the term “culture” is too definite, and led him to create more broad terms and phrases that define different aspects of culture based on what each of his subjects used to define themselves and their culture. Holliday discusses these terms in his conclusion and states “culture, or ‘a culture’ seem too definite and defining. The following terminology seems more appropriate to capture the less tangible, floating, organic, uncertain, yet highly impactful quality of what my interviews are talking about: Cultural reality, cultural arena, cultural universe, and cultural marker.” Essentially, Holliday uses these terms to capture all of the cultural elements his respondents discussed and to show that sometimes our terminology limits definitions of culture and identity.

Another element of cultural identity and identity exploration, and what relates to the exploration of the LDS missionary blogs are the experiences of international students who may be re-evaluating their definitions and theories of identity for themselves. Pitts (2009) explores this in his article. He spent 15 months conducting an ethnographic study observing and analyzing the experiences of short-term exchange students who were away from their native country for what is considered short-term, (i.e. a semester of school or one school year). About 127 students participated in different aspects of the study, and the author observed interactions and methods used by the various students to adjust and adapt to a culture not their own. The author discusses the cultural, social, and travel expectations of the students, where these expectations came from, and the gaps that were created as a result of these expectations. She also explores how the students’ ideas of themselves and the world around them are altered and different based on their

short-term experiences in another country. The author argues: “Identity formation included a new sense of who students were in relation to the rest of the world, as well as an expansion of their understanding of others.” This illustrates the author’s assertion that the students form a new and expanded identity based on their experiences as study abroad students, especially in the context of a short-term stay. The research establishes that short-term sojourners in foreign countries have a process of adaptation and identity negotiation which then leads to a new and expanded sense of identity.

Durovic, J. (2008) further explores the concept of intercultural communication and ethnic identity among immigrants in a study to evaluate experiences of Denmark nationals as well as immigrants, new and old, to Denmark in order to determine how individuals identify themselves culturally and ethnically and also what stereotypes these individuals have encountered while being identified. The author had a simple survey in which about 200 people were approached and around 174 people responded to the survey. Once she noticed certain trends from these results, the author decided to conduct personal, more in depth interviews with around 20 people in order to be able to ask more specific and thorough questions regarding her research. The author notes that while there were instances of stereotyping for each culture and ethnicity, it was only the negative stereotypes that had an impact on her subjects. The positive comments may have been incorrect, but were seen as an innocent or harmless error, and were corrected with no ill will. On the other hand, if a negative stereotype was asserted, individuals had a variety of reactions, but each was negatively affected. As a result, the individuals tended to resent being categorized by whatever negative stereotype they became associated with. An example from the author is a Muslim being told “all Muslims are rapists” or a Polish woman being told “all Polish women are prostitutes.” It is because of all the negative connotations asserted that individuals preferred not

to be categorized by only one ethnicity, religion, or culture. A Muslim who also considered himself Danish wanted to be known not simply as Muslim, and so on (Durovic, 2008). The author concludes that people who have various ways to define their identity based on culture, ethnicity, and religion do not want to be characterized as being a certain way based on one of their identities. They see themselves as a combination of each strong attribute that makes them individuals.

Symbolic Interaction

The ideas of symbolic interaction help to define and discuss “self.” These tenets have been discussed by various scholars of the decades, but revolve around the idea of self as a complex system that came from writings by Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead (Hewitt, 2000). The basic tenets of symbolic interaction state that meaning is a product of life, society is a network of social interactions where people assign meaning to their own actions and to the actions of others, individuals are actors and not just reactors, a person may play different roles or have different “selves,” and that the self has at least two dimensions in the form of “I” and “me.” Mead (1939) emphasizes that the mind and body are inseparable aspects of evolution and work together to produce a unique human. During his time, Mead was going against the prevailing theories that separated the actions of the body and mind and how behavior is impacted. Mead’s ideas support the concept that all things are a product of their environment and are influenced or impacted by this environment. Things do not exist separate from the environment they come from. Mead also rejected the prevailing theories that instincts are what ruled human behavior. He felt that there was more to human conduct and behavior than simply instincts (Hewitt, 2000). The foundation of Mead’s views on behavior and symbolic interaction help to define these concepts today.

Symbolic interaction and how it impacts communication concepts is discussed by Faules and Alexander (1978). In discussing symbolic interaction and communication, these authors state: “How one experiences something is dependent on what meaning one brings to that experience, which is mainly a product of learned symbols. Response to an experience is partially in terms of the learning experiences of others that have been communicated through a shared system of significant symbols.” This is the most important concept in Faules’ and Alexander’s discussion of symbolic interaction because it directly relates to the experiences related by the LDS missionaries in their blogs. As missionaries, they will see things through the lens of a strongly religious person who will interpret the actions of various cultures through their own moral compass or moral values. The interactions they have as missionaries and how they portray the culture and the people of a foreign country will be seen through the lens of their community and value system. As a result, what may be seen, observed, or documented by the missionaries will directly reflect the environment they came from and how they see the world. This makes for a unique perspective that may be found to be similar among the missionaries, but is not universal among other travelers, bloggers, or those experiencing different cultures.

Identity Formation and Religion

Religion plays an important part in identity theory and identity development. Chen (2010), discusses identity theory and how religion is linked to identity in order to provide a frame of reference for the data about religion and other social experiences. Religion is essential and inherent in identity discussion. Even if a person is not religious, his or her interaction with religion is an element of their identity. Chen states, “religions were essentially and irrevocably committed to healing and reconciling what is broken (on any level) and to stabilizing and reinforcing wholeness.” This theory is asserting that religion plays a dominant and primary role

in identity theory. “The term ‘identity’ has been chosen in preference to other concepts such as meaning, integration, interpretation of reality, order, security, and the like. It connotes ‘sameness,’ ‘wholeness,’ ‘boundary,’ and ‘structure.’ And these concepts in turn are crucial for the understanding of the function of religion for individuals as well as for groups, both in primitive and modern societies.” This explanation helps to understand how identity and religious beliefs connect and become a part of the frame or ways in which people look at themselves and how these religious identities impact their interaction with others.

One way for people who are religious to develop their identity is to construct, whether consciously or subconsciously, a conversion narrative. This is explored in relation to how Christians in Malaysia talk about their conversion narratives in the paper by Dumaing, David, and Dealwis (2011). For religious people conversion narratives are used as a tool to express and summarize their personal experience with God and how that has shaped their identity, actions, and self. Conversion narratives are also used to help understand and strengthen self-identity. Essentially, this conversion narrative helps build and define the identity of the individual and how it has been constructed or influenced by religious beliefs. The development and sharing of a conversion narrative is common among people of various religious beliefs, in particular Christians. The elements of the conversion narrative, or the things that make the conversion narrative a useful tool for analysis is reflected in this discussion by Dumaing (2011), et al:

One important aspect in studying the construction of identity is a speaker’s speech community, which contributes toward establishing a speaker’s identity. It becomes recognizable through a speaker’s use of lexical items and manner of speaking. The concept of speech community is described as the shared dimension related to the ways in which members of the group use, value, or interpret language. (Saville-Troike 2003). Therefore, group and individual identity could be established within the speech community membership of a speaker. Such identity construction from being ‘bad’ to being ‘good’ may reflect the core values emphasized by the church.

This discussion demonstrates why it is useful to examine and analyze conversion narratives and the ways in which the speakers use language and speech to define their religious identity.

Dumaing, et al, also use the Identity Theory of Religion, discussed by J (Hans) Mol. They argue that Mol's Theory shows that religion shows interactions between people through personal, social, and group identity, which is part of how social order is maintained and cultivated. Furthermore, the theory argues that religious behavior and beliefs become embedded in a person's social behavior. This is why exploring blogging from the perspective of religious media is valuable.

Hans Mol (1979) discusses the Identity Model of Religion and how it compares to nine categories of theory in Japan. Mol connects identity theory and religion as he talks about wholeness-maintenance and the way that identity theory can use religion as a way to shape and understand the social identity that exists for individuals. Mol relates identity theory and religion by stating: "Religions were essentially and irrevocably committed to healing and reconciling what is broken (on any level) and to stabilizing and reinforcing wholeness." He continues to expound about this by asserting that religion helps people to develop a system of meaning that directly impacts their identity, especially in social and group identity discussions. Mol and his discussion of the Identity Theory of Religion recognize that religion is a key element in identity and identity negotiation.

There are many religious groups who use blogs as a platform to explore their identity, and religion is a large element of this identity, as argued by Mol. As Eckert and Chadha (2013) explore in their article about Muslim bloggers in Germany, "some German Muslims have turned to blogs as an alternative space where they not only undertake processes of self-definition, but also challenge dominate public discourse through a variety of discursive practices." The authors

further talk about counterpublics and the ways in which blogs have shaped how identity and communities have been built by the Muslims in Germany. They emphasize the idea that virtual spaces provide new publics or platforms for religious individuals who are exploring their identities and their communities. This study helps us to see how using the Internet and online resources, specifically blogs, show the ways in which individuals will not only explore their identities, or have a platform for self-presentation, but also to put forth the distinctive characteristics of their identity, such as religion. It is through platforms such as blogs that individuals can express themselves completely or more freely than they can being limited to the in-person sphere.

Along those lines, Stout (2012) discusses how the Islamic community uses the media and the Internet to reconcile their beliefs with the public or secular sphere of the media. The response of some groups of Muslims is similar to the German Muslims. They have taken the media and created “hybrid genres that combine religious teaching with secular formats.” This shows that religious individuals have realized that various media platforms can help them to create and explore their religious identity. Instead of media being a purely secular medium, it can be a platform for religious narratives, identity exploration, and various other categories that help members of religious denominations connect to their religious community.

The Platform of Blogging

Taricani’s (2007) article about communities of blogging discusses the ways blogs have become an important piece in identity negotiation and how we frame our identities. She talks about how our identity is shaped not only by our surroundings or external factors, but also by the tools we use to express ourselves. The use of various mediums such as blogs, narratives, social media, and other interactive community building mediums shape and define our identity. The use

of blogs as narratives and community building is a natural consequence of the progression of technology over the last couple of decades. Currently, people are not limiting themselves to only one sphere, or one simple interaction with their communities. They use blogs as ways to connect with people and assert their identities. Taricani asserts that identity takes on further dimensions of being both more real and more fake as blogs and other technology are used and controlled by individuals to portray and explore their identity negotiation. As a way to explain blogs and how they have become an important medium for identity formation and community building, Taricani states:

Blogging is a popular social and cultural collection of thought and communication. It consists of a presence that is an expression of who we are, our identity. Culture attempts to adopt this technology across dimensions of life, such as personal and professional life. Detouzos (1997) described it as a world of human-centric computing that will insinuate the lives of individuals in societies that have learned to accept technology. Blogging is a way of extending ourselves in a virtual world. We are virtually being broadcast through the ubiquitous platform of the Internet.

Essentially, the ways in which we use blogs are being manifest as a unique way of self-identification and identity projection.

Ibrahim (2008) outlines the ways in which blogs and the blogosphere have created a virtual archive that is available to the public. In looking at the habits of bloggers and content found in the blogosphere, Ibrahim notes that the blogosphere is about using text to shape and explore social practices that emerge from the ways in which content is produced and consumed through technology and public spheres. He also discusses the elements to be examined during an analysis of blogs and the people who write them. He writes: "The blogosphere is a repository for people's narratives has to be analyzed for both content and context, as well as the range of factors which sustain the social praxis of personal expression on a public platform, the different types of social activities that emerge from it." The culture of blogging has become prevalent in

the age of technology and has reflected the way in which people interact with the public. The virtual world is a reflection of ourselves, through things such as social media and blogs. It is through this social interaction on the web that people have found various mediums and ways to not only express themselves and explore their culture and identity, but to get feedback, create communities, and to be influenced by people outside of their physical sphere.

Footnote (1990), discusses archives, memory and culture in his article and states that archives are a valuable means of increasing and extending our human communication without regard to distance or special environmental factors that were previously restrictive. It is natural for people to desire to have an archive of their thoughts, actions, and habits. What is different about the archives of the past and the archives of today is the medium. As Ibrahim asserts: “Besides personal narratives, the elements of interactivity enable spectators to both consume and contribute in the blogosphere, transforming such spaces into therapeutic devices for those who are afflicted to share their trauma and to seek empathy from fellow human beings without the constraints of geography or national boundaries.” In this way, blogs are more unique than the earlier archives. Of course, blogs are not a new phenomenon, and the Internet has provided various mediums for this interactivity. However, the nature of the Internet and how we connect to it or interact has changed over the course of time: “If the Web was once a library, it has now transformed into a vast conversation. Ibrahim notes that while older adults go online to source information, younger users go online to “live” and in the process, they blur the boundaries between the private and the public and between online and offline communities.” This is demonstrating that while the Internet as a medium is not new or revolutionary, the ways in which we interact and connect through the Internet has developed. The impact of this development is why it is necessary to examine and explore mediums unique to the Internet such as blogs, social

media and other methods used to expand and open a person's environment to something that extends beyond their physical or in person experiences.

Chen (2010) discusses how blogs have become powerful mediums for individuals. She also cites the study from Papacharissi (2002) and the results he found while exploring the differences between blogs and other Internet mediums. He noticed that on average, a blog would feature a self-reflective account that served the purpose of personal expression. He asserts in the study that "personal home pages present a medium for self-presentation, whereas blogs, on average, present a medium for self-disclosure." Chen further argues that blogs "provide a host of communicative advantages over traditional face-to-face interaction. ... a hyper-personal message sender (the blogger) has a greater ability to strategically develop and edit self-presentation, enabling a selective and optimized presentation of himself to others." This is connected to culture and self-identification, as culture is what creates and defines a society in the way that memory helps to create and define individuals. Blogs provide a platform for individuals to manage and create a persona that expresses the exact image they want to portray. By using this control, bloggers are able to appeal to specific individuals and specific audiences, and therefore become mini "celebrities" among their blogging communities. This indicates how bloggers take liberty and control of what they present and this communication is different than other Internet communication, such as email and personal homepages. Chen's discussion of blogs as a platform shows how individuals present themselves in the virtual world and how this medium has become a dominant way to explore ways people self-identify.

Antunovic and Hardin (2013) write about women bloggers and the community building that occurs through the blogosphere. As the authors point out, "When women blog, irrespective of the topic- they are sharing their life experiences and perspectives, documenting and passing on

knowledge, reaching out to other women (and men), and giving them a voice.” One of the reasons blogs are an important element to study and analyze is that blogs allow people to explore the self, their culture, and their identities in a social sphere that is not limited or restrictive the way face-to-face interaction is. This exploration of self is what is interesting in identity discussion and religious identity narratives. Furthermore, bloggers often create an identity or self, and then as discussed before, become known for that identity. As a result, they start altering their self, or the self they portray online to coincide or reflect the content that will be meaningful and appeal to their readers. This helps them to build a virtual community of people with similar interests who are seeking to connect on the levels emphasized or portrayed in that community. Although this study talks about women bloggers, the concepts of self-exploration and the communities created by the blogosphere are discussed and acknowledged. The measures used by women bloggers are the same used by any bloggers. A lot of the time they focus on one community, interest, or interaction in order to have their own virtual community. Also, while they are not limited by subject matter, the choices they make about what their narratives are and what they blog about is what demonstrates how they frame their identities.

Blogging and Identity

Blogs are an extension of someone’s thoughts and feelings. They can take on different purposes for different goals; however, they are still a reflection of what and who we are as individuals. “The majority of blogs are of the personal journal type, which deals with the bloggers’ personal experiences and reflections.” (Taricani, 2007). Blogs are also a way in which we form and shape our identity. Taricani talks about this in her “Communities of Blogging” article by stating: “Our identity is so much more than one angle and one medium. It is being defined and shaped by the use of the tools that are in our hands.” She goes on to talk about how

identity can both be real and fake on blogs. This is an important concept. There is an element of fake and real in blogging and what someone chooses to share with the world. At the same time, a blog helps a person to determine and define his identity.

Many religious believers and institutions have adopted technology for expressing their faith and reaching out to nonbelievers (Dawson & Cowan, 2004), but there have not been formal practices started by those individuals or institutions. It is clear, however, that personal blogs contain conversion narratives, and other religious elements that contribute to identity negotiation. Buddenbaum (2002) also states that “researchers study the media and religion in isolation from each other and both at least somewhat separate from other institutions and from the surrounding culture.” In other words, blogs in the religious sphere exist, and blogs have been explored as virtual communities, but the scholarship or studies looking at the role of religion in blogging is usually not addressed. While this study will focus on only one element of religious blogging, there are many forms that still dominate the blogosphere.

LDS missionary blogs are prevalent enough that an article was written about the use of blogs by LDS missionaries in the *Desert News*, on March 26, 2012. In the article, it explores the practices of LDS missionaries to blog about their experiences, and includes details that indicate their feelings about their missions, the people they interact with and their conversion narratives. The LDS spokesman who was quoted in the article states, “Generally, blogs documenting the experiences of missionaries are maintained by family members or friends from home. Often these blogs draw upon letters or photos sent by the missionary.” Even though religious blogs are common, and LDS missionary blogs are popular within their religious community, the spokesman stated that there was no official LDS church policy for missionary blogs or Internet use, beyond the general Internet guidelines outlined by the LDS church. As quoted by the *Desert*

News, those guidelines state “Members are encouraged to be examples of their faith at all times and in all places, including on the Internet. If they use blogs, social networks, and other Internet technologies, they are encouraged to strengthen others and help them become aware of that which is useful, good, and praiseworthy.” This article and discussion show that the LDS Missionary blogs are a common and popular practice among missionaries. It also shows that blogs are a dominant medium for religious missionaries wishing to present themselves to friends, family, and others who may be interested in their religious journey as a missionary.

The research question I will explore in a textual analysis of various LDS missionary blogs are:

RQ 1: How do LDS missionaries describe their cultural interactions and experiences while serving foreign missions?

Chapter Two: Methodology

LDS Missionaries are volunteers who decide to volunteer their time and interests for a varying span of time to talk to people who do not share their religious beliefs. There are various types of missionaries, in and out of the LDS church, but the most common or widely known missionaries from the LDS church are proselyting missionaries. Other types of missionaries are service and humanitarian missionaries (www.lds.org/callings/missionary). For the purposes of this study, I will focus only on the proselyting missionaries as they are the most common, or at least the most commonly known. These missionaries are called to serve in various locations around the world for 18 or 24 months, at the expense of themselves or their families. The choice to volunteer could be influenced by various factors, but ideally, the motivation is the same, to share the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) with those of other faiths or beliefs. Most of the time, proselyting includes a combination of knocking on people's doors, approaching people in the street, and meeting with people who have expressed an interest in the message the missionaries are trying to share. While missionaries have various experiences along the positive or negative scale, there is a commonality in their experiences simply because for the most part, their methods and actions are the same, regardless of whether they are male or female or what country they are serving in. This presents an opportunity for analysis, as the basic experiences of proselyting missionaries will be similar, regardless of location. Also, this foundation makes it easier to see how individual missionaries use their narrative and experiences as a missionary to shape their religious identity, as well as frame the narrative of their missionary experiences that they are sharing publically.

A textual and thematic analysis allows me to use all of the data from the blogs to determine what themes are present throughout the discourses of LDS missionaries and also how their narratives reflect their religious and personal identities. The use of textual analysis enables me to focus simply on the text of the blogs, rather than the text and other external factors. As I intended to focus on the narratives presented by the LDS Missionaries on their blogs, relating to cultural issues. A textual analysis will be the best way to illustrate and find themes in these narratives. Elfriede Fursich (2009) states “The narrative content of media content, its potential as a site of ideological negotiation and its impact as mediated ‘reality’ necessities interpretation in its own right” (p. 238). Fursich’s article defending textual analysis helps to outline the history behind textual analysis and why it is an important and valuable research method. He states: “Instead of standardized content analysis cultural media scholars concerned with media content developed and used qualitative reading strategies.” He further explains that through further development, cultural studies developed so that “not only written material but every cultural practice or product can be analyzed as text.” This helped the development of textual analysis and made a distinction between methods of qualitative research that were more generalized, or did not focus simply on the text. Fursich also explains “Textual analysis is generally a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text. Text is understood as a complex set of discursive strategies that is situated in a special cultural context” (Barthes, 1972 referenced in Fursich, 2009). Fursich also explains that textual analysis allows a researcher to discover latent meaning, as well as patterns, assumptions, and omissions from the text. This shows how a textual analysis can be a valuable and useful research tool that will enhance research, rather than hinder it.

In further research, and with a similar purpose to Fursich, Phillipov (2013) discusses how she uses textual analysis as an alternative to traditional quantitative analysis that has a “limitation to manifest content and to quantifiable categories.” Phillipov states in the abstract “textual analysis can offer creative ways to articulate experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible to empirical research methods, and that the use of text-based approaches can improve, rather than weaken, our understanding of popular media and culture.” Phillipov further argues that while textual analysis has its faults, or limitations, there is a benefit to be found in textual analysis that cannot be found in empirical research. She states: “While textual analyses have been (rightly) critiqued for assigning meanings to media products without adequately considering participants’ contexts or experiences of consumption, empirical research methods offer no guarantee that the researcher will also not impose his/her own meanings and interpretations on the media or cultural form under examination.”

Kang and Yang (2009) looked at gay and lesbian blogs in China to explore the rhetorical practices that occur within a minority group on blogs. The authors conducted an extensive online search and found a total of 43 gay and lesbian blogs. Kang and Yang felt that a textual analysis was the best way to examine the rhetoric and text used by the bloggers. As stated by the authors: “We read every blog post carefully to identify rhetorical features related to the practices of reversed silence.” The article by Kang and Yang demonstrates how a textual analysis can help to illustrate the views and personal narratives shared by a minority community through blogging.

In order to conduct my research, I followed the steps used by Helene Snee (2010) in her article “Using Blog Analysis,” to actually search for and locate the blogs I needed for this study. Snee’s article outlines the ways to find blogs and use them in research by discussing how to search for blogs, how to manage the blog data, and the ethics of blog research. As a result, I used

the methods Snee describes to locate and gather the data from the blogs selected. However, in order to analyze the blog data, I refer to the methods outlined by Tang and Chao (2010) in their article about American expatriates in China and their blogs. They provide a model of how they analyzed the blog data that I will emulate during my own analysis.

Snee researched students' blogging about their "gap year" and wrote an article about her processes, as well as the results from her research. Snee starts by outlining how she searches for the blogs. She uses a Google blog search as well as Technorati to locate blogs with the phrase "gap year." These searches led her to specific websites that are used for blogs, such as Myspace, LiveJournal, etc. As the results were too high for Snee to analyze herself, she narrowed the field to blogs that were truly only about a gap year, versus some which had talked about a gap year, but not actually about a gap year. Snee created a table for the blogs she looked at, and determined a list of criteria she used for the blogs she included in the sample. As Snee outlines, she reviewed a total of 700 blogs, and selected 39 for her final sample. Snee also describes the method of converting blogs to a text file by stating that she converted the webpages to a text file, using Internet Explorer. The process she used was different than what I used to convert the blogs gathered to text, but the goal was the same. Converting the blogs to text enables the researcher to look at only the text to be able to code the data more efficiently. Snee addresses the ethics of using blogs as research text in her article. She argues: "Although the blogs I sampled were freely available on the Internet, the difference between public and private is 'blurred' online. People might write something without thinking about how anyone with an internet connection can access it- in other words, they might have a false sense of privacy." There are both private and public blogs, but all of the LDS missionary blogs I have accessed are fully public and accessible. The missionaries have not chosen to make their blogs private or restrict access, therefore making

them open to public consumption and review. As it is an option to make a blog private, I feel confident that the missionary blogs I have accessed were intended for the public.

Tang and Chao (2010) explored how China was portrayed and depicted by American expatriates in their study. They used a random sample of blogs based on finding a list of blogs on the China Blog List website. Tang and Chao noted that there were a total of 272 blogs listed on the database they accessed. Ideally, they would have liked to do a comprehensive analysis of all of the blogs, but each blog had at least 100 posts and “the sheer number of blog posts presented a daunting challenge to in-depth analyses.” They eliminated the blogs that were focused on a narrow subject matter, and also those that did not have a clear narrative structure (Tang and Chao, 2010). In further discussion of the methodology, Tang and Chao state: “The early phase of the analyses was used to get the general feel of and to establish archives for each selected blog. We focused on the textual/semantic highlighted as well as its visual layout.” They modeled their analysis on Jager (2001) who emphasized the need to establish categories of analysis (p. 389). They created four categories to use to pinpoint the key areas that were discussed by the blogs they reviewed.

Following Snee’s (2010) steps, I accessed the website, Prepare to Serve, which has a Missionary Blog Index with a list of over 9,500 LDS missionary blogs. I initially found this website by doing a Google search for “Missionary Blogs.” While blogs from missionaries who are not Mormon did appear in the search list, the top results were all LDS missionary blogs or websites dedicated to listing those LDS Missionary blogs. The blogs are organized into subcategories of the 406 current LDS Missions in the world. Prepare to Serve is organized by mission, with each missionary who has a public blog being listed on a link that is clicked on per mission. In order to select my blogs, I chose missions in various parts of the world and then

clicked on a few missionaries in each mission until I was able to find missionary blogs that met the criteria I was using. I wanted to have a wide variety of blogs from both men and women, in various areas of the world. The focus of my research questions is to look at the ways missionaries discuss and define their identities as “foreign” missionaries, or in other words, missionaries in countries not their own. Therefore, I excluded all blogs in the United States. I also did not choose any blogs written by missionaries who were serving in their native countries. I used three criteria to select the blogs: 1. A missionary not in his or her country, 2. Not more than one person from the same mission, 3. Entries over the course of at least 12 months, during the time the data was pulled, in 2013 and 2014. I selected 20 missionaries and accessed their blogs over the course of a year, in order to get a picture of the language, voice, and ways in which they have framed their narratives. I narrowed this sample further by selecting only 8 missionaries for my final study, and six months of their blog entries. This is because the data volume was so large, it enabled me to glean a manageable amount to focus on and create a textual file to analyze and discuss.

Typically, the missionaries have used a combination of pictures and text to share their experiences, both spiritual and more lighthearted, with their friends, families, and other readers of their blogs. The format is essentially the same. As a blog, the entries are in a diary format, with the most recent post being the first, or dominate post on the page. To gather all of the data from the blogs, I have documented which blogs met the criteria listed. I created a table to list the name of the blogger, the date range of the posts, and the number of entries for the date range that were used (see Appendix A). The final study included 11 missionary blogs. The missionaries are both male and female. The missions represented among the missionaries selected are Cape Verde, Kenya Nairobi, Argentina Buenos Aires, Japan Tokyo, Brazil San Paolo, Brazil Rio,

Stockholm Sweden, Cebu Philippines, South Africa, Rome Italy, and Taiwan. For each missionary, I used the entries across a six month period of time from 2013 to 2014. The dates and entries vary according to the inclination of the missionary. From this point on, to distinguish each missionary or blog, I will refer to the missionary by the mission name, in order to protect the privacy of the missionaries themselves. The entries and date range for each blog are as follows: Cape Verde, January 2014-July 2014, 27 entries; Kenya, November 2013-July 2014, 37 entries; Argentina, June 2013-March 2014, 20 entries; Tokyo, February 2013-November 2013, 12 entries; Sao Paolo, December 2013-July 2014, 30 entries; Rio, November 2013-July 2013, 16 entries; Sweden, October 2013-May 2014, 22 entries; Cebu, May 2013-December 2013, 22 entries; South Africa, December 2013-July 2014, 34 entries; Rome, November 2013-June 2014, 34 entries; Taiwan, November 2013-June 2014, 12 entries. I also made copies of the entire text of the blogs with and without other media, such as pictures, graphs, or other things inserted. I want to focus only on the text, which is why I separated the text from the rest of the blog media. Along the lines of Tang and Chao (2010), I will look at different categories to group comments and narrative from the LDS Missionary blogs, in order to complete a textual analysis of the narrative presented. In order to focus on the cultural observations and statements about culture among the blogs, the first thing I did was to extract all references to culture from the entries of the eight missionaries I selected. I was able to create a comprehensive text that included the dates of the entries and only the phrases or stories that included comments, observations, and things unique to the country and the culture that the missionary was experiencing. This left me with a comprehensive text on culture from the missionaries. This is included in Appendix B. I wanted to sort and classify what the missionaries were talking about, what is important to them, and

ultimately, how they define their religion and identity through the lens of religious volunteers whose purpose is to proselyte in a country foreign to their own.

Through the process of textual analysis, I have been able to examine and somewhat understand the narratives and personal stories that have been presented by the LDS Missionaries throughout their blogs. The categories that emerged from reading the blogs revealed the dominant themes and observations from the missionaries and how they were impacted by the culture they were experiencing. While reading and looking for patterns throughout the blogs, I noticed some patterns that were universal, or expressed by all the missionaries and I noticed some things that were different, or unique to the individuals and possibly impacted by the country they were in.

I believe that the analysis within the categories that emerged will show the patterns for LDS Missionaries, and other bloggers who may be laboring as religious missionaries or simply travelling in a country foreign to their own. This will help bring understanding to the ways in which LDS Missionaries are impacted by their surroundings, and how that impacts their cultural identity. This will also help to provide valuable research that can serve as a foundation for future scholars who want to examine personal narratives, especially in regards to discussions of religion and religious themed blogs and histories.

Chapter Three: Findings

Initially, I had six months of blog entries from each missionary. From that text, I pulled out any phrases or entries about culture that were mentioned or referenced by each missionary. From this I created my main research text. I then read through each of entries with simply the cultural text. From this text, I was able to analyze the information based on generalized categories that helped me to narrow my focus and see the overall themes and trends from the text. I ended up finding eleven different categories that I identified based on what the missionaries talked about and how cultural elements were portrayed. The categories are: 1. Weather, 2. Cultural Values and Habits, 3. Holidays and Celebrations, 4. Food, 5. Language, 6. Miscellaneous Culture, 7. Basic Necessities, 8. Transportation, 9. Religion 10. Missionary Work: Finding, Teaching, Serving. These were the general categories created while coding to narrow the focus and see the common themes of each blog. From these categories I was able to see different ideas and common themes emerge among the foreign missionaries across the study, even though they were both male and female and in various parts of the world. As I relate my findings for each category, I will refer to each missionary by the mission or country they were in. This is true even in the case of the missionary who was sent to the South Africa mission and ended up also going to Botswana and Zambia. For the sake of consistency, this missionary is still referred to as South Africa. Also, as discussed before, most young adult missionaries serve between the ages of 18-20s. While the missionaries do not note or indicate their age throughout their blogs, this is an important factor in reading and analyzing their narratives. These are young adults who may or may not have travelled much or encountered very many cultures outside of their own. As missionaries, they are assigned companions who they are with 24 hours a day,

seven days a week. While I attempted to keep true to only the missionary's experience, the use of "we" and "us" often referred to the missionary and his or her companion or other missionaries. Also, their vocabulary, spelling, and grammar are going to be unique and sometimes not very refined. In the interest of capturing their true attitudes and words, I have left all misspellings, grammar, and other characteristics of writing and speech unique to the author. As a result, there is sometimes some awkward phrasing and spelling, but this gives a true perspective of the missionary's personality and perspective.

Weather

The first category that emerged is weather because it was a dominant point of conversation in almost every entry for every missionary. Even though initially it would seem that the weather is not something that relates to culture, for the missionaries, it impacted their lives significantly enough that it is mentioned repeatedly and throughout all of the entries from each missionary. It seems like this discussion and mentioning of the weather was not only because the weather has a huge impact on missionaries who proselyte on foot, bicycle, or are subject to the elements, but because any place that was not home was different or the differences were noticed. An example of this is Cape Verde who mentions the weather 5 times in 27 entries. He mentions things like, "It is hot and humid here practically year round.... Praia is really hot and the only time you actually feel a temperature change is when the sun goes down." He also compares himself to the local people in dress habits and states, "Weather has been pretty nice. People are still wearing sweaters and binis and I am still rocking the short-sleeve white shirts."

There are also times when discussion of the weather is to reflect how it has directly impacted the actions of the missionary. Kenya states: "People have been busy preparing their shambas (fields) for the rain. So we will also be helping a lot of people this week with service,

helping to cultivate and plow the fields.” Kenya goes on to state, “this week the rains came.. and didn’t want to leave! But we had to cancel a lot of our appointments this week, just because of the rain. When it rains here it’s almost impossible to work. The roads turn to strait mud and it’s impossible to get around. And even if it looks like it is going to rain people will cancel the appointment on us because it is too difficult to get around in the rain.” This shows how the weather directly impacted his work as a missionary and the experiences he had with the people he was meeting, teaching, and interacting with consistently.

Sweden also talks about how the weather affects the habits of the people and his work as a missionary. He writes, “There was a mini hurricane called Sven and the weather made things pretty crazy, but public transportation being shut down, parts of houses flying all over, ocean water flooding in, and things shattering and breaking left and right is no excuse not to be doing missionary work, right?” He continues, “People probably either thought we were crazy dedicated to Christ or just plain crazy.” Later Sweden also writes about the changing weather in Sweden and states, “As for Sweden, it’s finally starting to warm up a little and I think I saw the sun twice this week, so I’m pretty excited about that. I think the Swedes are too. Haven’t seen this many people outside during the day since I arrived here. You really don’t know how many people live in this country until the sun shows itself and then bam! Out they come.” These observations on the weather also show the habits and mannerisms of the Swedish, which can be attributed to cultural habits or actions, but also be directly affected by the weather itself.

South Africa talks about the difference in the weather not only between home, or what she is used to and South Africa, but the differences she notices from South Africa to Botswana to Zambia, all places where she ends up serving. While in Zambia she notices that it rains every single day. Also, that there are only three seasons, which she describes as “the cold season from

May to July, the hot season from August to October, and the rainy season from November to April.” She further comments that it “makes things interesting because we live on a dirt road and we don’t have a car. Every day it’s a game to try and see if we can make it down the street without getting stuck in the mud.” South Africa continues to talk about the rain, how it impacts the lives of the missionaries, and how it affects their actions and habits. South Africa mentions the rain consistently throughout her entries, however, it does not become as dominant in her narrative as for other missionaries. As she clearly has an understanding of the seasons or weather patterns in the areas she is in, it can be assumed that the weather becomes less noteworthy.

Italy also discusses the weather and how it impacts her movements and actions. While in Rome, she notes it is cold and rainy every day. This impacts her so much that she ruins the rain boots she has with her and has to buy new ones to stay warm and dry. She also comments that “it is way colder than I thought it would be” and she has to purchase additional blankets and things to keep her warm. In terms of how the weather affected her habits she states, “It was raining so hard it eroded a hill and blocked off a street. Same thing with the train tracks.” This made it impossible for her to meet the appointments she had or proceed normally. Later, as the weather turns warm, Italy talks about how the heat is something Italians deal with. She comments that Italians hate air conditioning and think it isn’t healthy. She notes, “This week two members told me they were allergic to air conditioning.” She further exclaims “I DON’T GET IT. It’s so hot.”

Taiwan also talks about how much the heat and humidity in Taiwan impact him on a personal level. In the spring, Taiwan states, “It’s warm here. The summer is going to be rough. I was already sweating and dying and it’s only spring. The name of the game now is to not have yellow shirts by the end of August.” On a personal level, he discusses how he has been breaking out because of the weather, humidity and stress. While he notes this can’t be helped, he also

notices that it is something the people in Taiwan point out and notice. He comments, “The reason why I keep bringing up my acne is because in Taiwan, within 1 minute of talking to me, the Taiwanese person starts talking to me about how bad my acne is. I’m used to it now, the culture is rather blunt, but they talk about it lots- well at least they speak to me.”

The greatest impact that weather had on any missionary experience in the study was for the missionary who was serving in Cebu, Philippines during the typhoon that hit the Philippines in the fall of 2013. He recounts the impact the typhoon has on the community:

The typhoon was so much worse than we thought. I don’t even know how to describe what has happened here in Tacloban. It’s been an emotional past couple of days for me. I have seen the news and the pictures and there are dead bodies everywhere – in trees, electric lines, crushed under buildings. They show it on live television. Over 10,000 people have died. We have been packing thousands of relief good truck-fulls of sacks. I was on national TV last night. I’m so sore and exhausted but ready to keep going.

This was a severe example of the weather impacting the actions and culture of the people in the Philippines, but also shows how the people dealt with such a tragedy and its impact on the missionary.

Cultural Values and Habits

There are cultural differences but also differences in standards or values that have been observed consistently commented upon throughout the blogs. As LDS missionaries, these bloggers have the desire to teach people about their religion and then have them get baptized and become members of the LDS church. Within this process of conversion is the necessity for there to be an acceptance of the LDS church values and standards that are necessary for baptism and expected to be followed by active members of the LDS church. As the missionaries are from the cultural perspective of the not only their own, American culture, but of the LDS church culture and values, they notice and observe the habits and the actions of the people they are teaching that are not in observance of LDS standards for members. This category mainly focuses on the

cultural differences observed by the missionaries. This does bring religion as the missionaries frame their interpretation through their own lens of religion and culture. However, these things are noted in this section and not the religion section because they are still cultural observations, whereas in the religion section people with various religious beliefs and those experiences are discussed.

Specifically, LDS church members commit to following the Law of Chastity, which states that there are no sexual relationships before marriage (“Law of Chastity,” lds.org). There is an emphasis on these and other standards for living among the teachings of the LDS church. The LDS church has two church-wide conferences semi-annually where topics relevant and important to the membership are discussed and counselled about. The governing body of the church, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and other leaders, discuss the topics of the Law of Chastity, Word of Wisdom and other principles that impact daily thoughts and actions during the course of these conferences. One leader, David A. Bednar discusses the Law of Chastity in General Conference in 2013. He uses the words of other leaders to emphasize the importance of this principle. He quotes Dallin H. Oaks, another church leader by stating: “Outside the bonds of marriage, all uses of procreative power are to one degree or another a sinful degrading and perversion of the most divine attribute of men and women” (Ensign, Nov. 1993, 74). There is further discussion about the other principles of the LDS church such as the Word of Wisdom, which is the law that governs the eating habits of most LDS people. According to the LDS church website, “In the Word of Wisdom, the Lord revealed that the following substances are harmful: Alcoholic drinks, tobacco, tea and coffee, when people purposefully take anything harmful into their bodies, they are not living in harmony with the Word of Wisdom” (“Word of Wisdom, lds.org). As these are the core teachings of the LDS

church that most of the missionaries have been taught growing up LDS and throughout their lives in meetings and in conferences, these ideals have affected their perspectives on the people around them and on the habits of the people they encounter.

These principles must be followed by anyone wishing to be baptized or become a part of the LDS church. Among many of the missionary narratives, there are observances of couples choosing to commit to each other and live together, but who are not legally married. This stands out to the missionaries as it is outside of their own frame of reference, but also because in order to be baptized, these couples must get legally married first. Therefore, the topic and issue of marriage becomes a concern and “problem” to be solved by the missionaries. Also, there are many references of people drinking alcohol and other substances prohibited by the Word of Wisdom. This also becomes an issue, or point of discussion.

Cape Verde addresses this issue by stating, “At this point, we are working with a lot of people who aren’t married but live with their spouses and have no interest in marriage or the Church. That is a big problem that we have run into.” As a result of investigators not caring or being worried about marriage until they meet the missionaries, weddings and wedding planning seem to become another element or experience the missionaries participate in. During the commentary for the first wedding experience for Cape Verde, he relates that the couple got married in the Registro office in front of a small group of people, with the missionaries there as prominent members of the company. Cape Verde himself, was the “photographer at the party.” He comments about the food selected for the celebration and those who participated. A few weeks later, he discusses another wedding. He states, “The missionaries before us started the marriage process with them and the missionaries after us got to enjoy the wedding planning.” This shows how prevalent and involved the missionaries are in the marriages and weddings of

the people they interact with and teach. It does not seem likely that these couples would care about getting married or arranging a wedding without the influence of the missionaries. Within the commentary about these weddings are observations of how marriage and these celebrations are viewed or treated in the specific culture. Cape Verde relates another wedding and states: “Thursday was the day of the wedding of E and S! They were an hour and a half late but it was still a beautiful wedding and the cake was awesome. They had a ‘party’ in their house and it was just funny to see S in her wedding dress serving fish and chicken.” These comments show not only the involvement of the missionary, but also how different the actions were of the people in Cape Verde to what he expected at a wedding.

The issue of morality or chastity is also mentioned by a lot of the other missionaries. Kenya reports, “Another interesting lesson with Titus this week... CHASTITY! Ya that lesson is always interesting.” Argentina also writes: “Oh, the Law of Chastity doesn’t really exist in Argentina. People who are members, just kinda forget about it. Kinda lame.” Argentina further states, “Weddings here are pretty rare because everyone lives together and lives with their girlfriends and boyfriends. They live together for like 10 years too without getting married. There’s no price in getting married, people are just too lazy to do it. Kinda lame really.” Rio also comments about people she is teaching and the moral issue or the marriage issue. She writes, “The verdict is still out on this family. The first hurdle is to help them get legally married, but they both want to be baptized.” All of these examples are discussing people in various countries throughout the world and the different societal or moral expectations that exist, or the lack of these expectations. As a tourist or even a student who lived in those countries, unless that person had strong, conservative, religious beliefs, the actions or lack of action in not getting married probably wouldn’t have been a point of observation, or something that became an issue for the

missionaries. However, as missionaries, they were bound by the teachings of the religion they represented and had to enforce certain rules and standards on the people they taught who did not follow those moral guidelines. In each experience, or throughout the entries, there were multiple examples. There were not only isolated incidents that could be attributed to just one person or one couple's habits or personality. It is safe to say that while the actions of the people observed may not represent all groups in each country, they were representative of a good cross section of those populations that the missionaries in the study encountered.

There are other elements of cultural values and habits that stand out to the missionaries for the same reasons of religious values and beliefs. In the LDS church, members are taught to respect and observe the Sabbath day, or Sunday, by refraining to work or shop or do other such activities on Sundays. There are many observances by the missionaries of people working or shopping on Sunday who are both LDS members and those the missionaries encounter. These encounters are commented on by the missionaries and indicates both the cultural and religious differences of the people the missionaries interact with. These cultural habits were noticed or observed because of the "difference" or more importantly because of the high lifestyle standards from their own LDS culture that pertain to keeping the Sabbath day holy and the lifestyle and dietary guidelines followed by LDS members called the Word of Wisdom. There are discussions and habits observed by the missionary that show standard practice or cultural norms were contradictory to the standards presented by the LDS church. As a result, not only did the missionaries comment on these instances when they occurred, but they also discussed how this affected the religious beliefs and practices of the people they interacted with. These observations were noted when both LDS members and those investigating the religion were participating. In other words, while the LDS church has standards that to the American missionaries were non-

negotiable, the cultural habits or standards seemed to take precedent over any church teachings for all of the people they encountered, whether members of the LDS faith or not.

This can be seen through examples from the missionaries themselves. Kenya talks about the difficulties of the people following the Word of Wisdom which prohibits drinking coffee and tea. He states that “everyone here drinks coffee and tea every day.” He also talks about the Sabbath day commandment or the habits of the people on the Sabbath day. He mentions it frequently during the six months of data pulled for the study. He relates this story and the way he describes the actions of the LDS church member and his feelings about it show the cultural differences in habits and obedience:

At the church is a church shamba (farm/garden), for all of the members to use to grow things. So he [a Kenyan member of the LDS church] went to work in his shamba.... at the church.... on Sunday... not even coming inside to take the sacrament or to go to the classes. We asked him what he was doing and he was just like super confounded haha. elder maduna said "Now God is going to curse your shamba for sure!" i was like ohhh snap.... haha but its true. If we are not obedient, we can receive no blessings. It was both funny and sad at the same time. But afterwards i felt really bad, just that he was working on the sabbath, at the Lords shamba, not even coming to church. Weird experience. Sometimes i don't understand people.

The language and observations used by Kenya in this passage show that the standards of what keeping the Sabbath means to him, or LDS people in America, and how they are different than in Kenya, and other countries around the world. In a later entry, Kenya states: “After church we were walking around the market going to an appointment. So as we are passing by, all the sudden something catches my eye in a shop. It was the sister we gave a blessing to! She was buying some food! Ha I was like well... I don't know what to do at this point. It's a very common thing for people to buy stuff on the Sabbath.”

Tokyo also discusses these moral issues or the different values found in Japan concerning these principles. She relates the story of one investigator and talks about her employment on

Sundays while also commenting about why it is something missionaries notice, or the principle that has been ingrained in the missionary. She writes:

She wants to get work off on Sundays but is so worried that she won't be able to. I always look back to the days in young women's where we role played the scenario of asking our coach or our boss to not do certain things on Sunday and I've heard countless stories about how the boss was such a respecter of someone wanting to attend church... but I for some reason feel like it's a little different here in Japan, but she said she'll try!

This example not only shows the observations of the missionary, or that something such as working on Sunday was something that stuck out to the missionary, but she also acknowledges that while this is the culture she knows and the principle she is familiar with, the same will probably not be true in Japan.

Sweden also talks about the Sabbath day but also how different Sweden is with these morals or rules not because of the habits of the Swedish people, but more so because of the abundance of other cultures in Sweden. This is an experience unique to the missionary in Sweden. He talks about visiting a Protestant church, a Seventh Day Adventist church and a Muslim mosque. As an outsider to Sweden, and because he had already observed that the country in general was predominately atheist, he decides to interact with anyone who will interact with him, regardless of belief or culture. In his account of different religious experiences, Sweden recounts, "The people there were a little confused why the Mormons were there, but they expressed they too were very impressed that we were attending a service of another faith. Afterwards we had a vegetarian lunch with the congregation, because they don't eat meat, and there were two guys who whipped out their bibles and just basically yelled at us for three hours about how the bible says the Sabbath is on Saturday." This is something that was unique only to the missionary in Sweden, but shows how culture and religion play dominant roles in any experience.

Similarly, teachings about modesty in appearance and dress are emphasized by the LDS church and the lack of modesty is consistently pointed out by various missionaries. According to lds.org, modesty is described as “an attitude of propriety in decency in dress, grooming, language, and behavior.” It further states, “If we are modest, we do not draw undue attention to ourselves.” All of these issues may not have been as relevant or even stood out as much to other expatriates or tourists, but become points of observation and commentary for the missionaries who see things through from their own cultural and religious frame. The other observations about issues that would relate to the morality or differences in moral values in the minds of the missionaries in observing those native to the countries they were visiting manifested itself in the form of comments on modesty or immodesty and personal grooming habits. It seems like this would not be something observed or noticed by the missionaries, but the differences in habits were prominent enough to garner comments by many of the missionaries throughout their six months of entries.

Kenya points out that he sees “more and more naked kids walking around.” He further writes, “The kids here have no shame!!!” This is something he continues to observe repeatedly. He mentions children and people walking around with nudity and also publically relieving themselves in places that the missionary does not understand. Kenya relates: “In the middle of the church is like a little courtyard thing. We see this little kid come waltzing out of the room. He takes one step out of the room, pulls down his trousers and starts peeing all over the courtyard.” He mentions countless other experiences or instances with all of the same actions. He is completely appalled by the lack of modesty, or the freeness of the habits of the people in Kenya. He attributes it to “no shame,” again and again. However, this is clearly just a difference in cultural acceptance and expectations.

Argentina also notices a lot of nudity in different forms. He discusses seeing older men and women in clothing that he thinks is not modest, or not covering enough to be “normal.” He further expounds by saying, “Everywhere you go, people just don’t wear shirts. Whether you are a guy or a girl. You just don’t wear them. It’s not cool to wear shirts I guess.” Even though he makes this observation quite early into his experience as a missionary, he points out this issue again and again throughout his narrative.

South Africa notices various instances in which encounters with people in South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia becomes hindered or awkward based on their own personal habits or choices that she doesn’t understand, such as the consumption of alcohol. She relates a story about a man trying to sell her a turtle, but initially she doesn’t speak to him. He called out to her and she states “his speech was kind of slurred so we thought he was drunk so we just ignored him.... We kept ignoring him because usually drunk men = trouble.” She has consistent references and comments that are similar, but do not overtly take over her narrative until one post in June where she gets quite passionate about the subject of alcohol. The following passage portrays not only the missionary’s feelings about alcohol, but how that opinion has been shaped by her belief system.

Alcohol. I legitimately and honestly just do not understand why people drink. I've tried to think of even one positive thing that comes from drinking and I can't do it! There is nothing good that comes of it! It makes you act like an idiot, it makes you smell bad, it kills brain cells, it destroys families and relationships. It's just so dumb! It is one of the most frustrating thing I have had to deal with my entire mission. I understand that it can and is a legitimate addiction that is hard to overcome. So for that reason I admire people who try to give it up. But it just makes me so sad to see people with so much potential completely throw their lives away because they drink! Just don't take that first drink!!! I'm so grateful I grew up in a place and in a home where I wasn't exposed to it so now that I'm old enough to make my own decisions, I have a very solid stand on the issue and there is nothing in heaven or earth that would change that.

The rest of the observations from South Africa are less direct or blunt, but follow along these lines when it comes to the subject of alcohol.

Rome discusses the differences in values, or the actions of the Italians when it comes to someone not living a rule or law that is necessary to become a baptized member of the LDS church. She states “We got to see G and we committed her to quit smoking! She really wants to get baptized, so we are working on some commandments to get her ready to be baptized the same day as her little brother.” She makes similar observations about someone else she is working with by commenting, “We went to AM’s but she was smoking when we got there which was really sad because we have been working so hard on helping her to quit smoking.” She further talks about the same person and states, “She is still really having a hard time quitting smoking.” A few months later, in another entry, Rome references the same person and observes, “She still isn’t making much progress as far as quitting smoking goes... but she is so sincere about her desire to get baptized.” Clearly, the issues are connected and one cannot come without the other being eliminated.

Rome also talks about her encounters with the drunk Italian men. She specifically writes about one encounter who “kissed our hands and then grabbed my head to try to kiss me... but because he was so drunk it was an easy dodge.” Then, as they were going to meet their ride, the man followed them and tried to get into the car. The woman who was picking them up noted that she had never seen anyone like that in her city in her whole life. Rome casually comments, “I believe it. Most tranquilo city ever. We just attract all the crazies.”

Holidays and Celebrations

Another element or category that emerged from the missionary blogs was observances of holidays and celebrations. As LDS missionaries, all of the subjects primarily spend their time

looking for people to teach or talk to or participating in some service activities. For about half of the blogs, the six month time span was during the FIFA World Cup of 2014. As a result, for these missionaries, the World Cup and other holidays, celebrations, or large national sporting events became a dominant part of their lives, and impacted their habits and actions as missionaries and also provided them with cultural insights.

Cape Verde relates the different holidays he celebrates such as New Years and a holiday that was celebrating liberty, though no one could really tell him what that holiday was. Also, during large national holidays, the actions and work of the missionaries is impacted. Cape Verde states, “Because of Carnival (a huge holiday here) all of the flights and boats are bought out for the week. It won’t be a very easy week though because of all the parties and things that have been and will be going on. Tomorrow, the day of, we are not allowed to go out and teach so it looks like we will be doing a lot of studying.”

There is another holiday that comes up in May and Cape Verde comments: “On May 1st it was the Cape Verdean version of Labor Day, called ‘Dia dos trabalhadores.’ Basically, on that day, everyone goes to work, but doesn’t have to work, but rather have a huge party so even fewer people were at home that day but it was still a good day.”

Once the World Cup starts, life habits are changed and everything is altered. As Cape Verde describes:

You would think that because Cape Verde was disqualified from the World Cup (they had a player with a red card play) that they wouldn’t be as into watching it. Oh forget that. Everyone, their Praia dog, and their goat are watching the games! And with a game starting every three hours, it is making it a little harder to teach. Everyone seems to be a fan of Brazil or Portugal or Argentina or Italy or they are part of the ‘Team Africa must win’ movement. ... To add [to] the craziness, everyone is having parties where some people are getting a little hammered.

These are his observations from the beginning of the World Cup. As the World Cup progresses, it is more of the same thing. It dominates the actions, habits and movements of everyone, including the missionaries. It shows how important the World Cup is and how much a part of life and the culture of Cape Verde and other countries as well. This is not surprising as soccer is hugely popular across the world. However, as it is not something as prevalent or popular in American culture, it is also not surprising how much of a culture shock it creates in the foreign missionaries.

The Sao Paulo missionary also comments about the World Cup and its impact in Brazil. She writes, “World Cup also starts—on days where Brazil plays, we can’t leave the house after 4:00.” She continues, “Oh, World Cup. That’s the other complicating factor. But we play tomorrow, and I think then on Sunday.. and then it’s over!” The missionary in Rio also writes “Our work has been really odd because of the World Cup. We will have a few really great teaching days and start gaining momentum, then we are stalled because there will be a Brazil game and we have to stay at home.” She writes later, “Today was another odd day of work because of the World Cup. Brazil won their game and everyone went CRAZY... really CRAZY. Like running into the street and taking off their clothes crazy!”

Besides the commentary and differences in how people reacted to the World Cup, or such a large sporting event, there were also observations and differences in holidays. Of course, other countries do not always celebrate the same holidays that people celebrate in America. Or, if they celebrate them, it is not always in the same ways. Kenya talks about Easter by saying, “To be honest, I almost forgot it was Easter. No fun festivities, but I felt like people were more hyped up for Palm Friday and Good Friday than Easter Sunday. Saw a ton of people out in the street mobbin’ around with palm leaves doing some goofy things with them and chanting and I don’t

know what else.” Not only does this statement show the differences in how a holiday is celebrated, it also shows the attitude of the missionary towards those differences. Everything different or not the same as what he knows is “goofy” or “crazy” or some other descriptive. While this is the casual language he uses in his blog, or a space he presumably feels comfortable in, it is interesting to see what he uses as descriptors when talking about anything other than what he knows.

There are a few different accounts of Christmas and what the missionaries experienced. Argentina states, “Christmas was pretty slow. We didn’t work. Argentina is full of drunks during the holiday season. So we stayed inside and had pancakes.” Argentina also explains a little more about how holidays are for missionaries by saying, “It states in the Missionary Handbook that holidays and Sundays are the best days for tracting because that is when families are home. In Argentina, it’s the days of futbol and drinking. So Sundays and holidays, not so great here.” Rio comments about Christmas by saying, “Christmas came and went without a fuss. There is very little Christmas spirit here unless you count setting off bombs/fireworks as a way of bring the spirit of Christmas.” She goes on to state, “People began showing Christmas spirit by setting off fireworks/mini bombs on a 1-2 minute basis, and drinking massive amounts of alcohol, and blasting 90’s music with the occasional commercial Christmas song.” She also explains, “Christmas here is very different from home. They have a huge meal on Christmas Eve at midnight on Christmas Eve/morning – and then sleep in really late the next day. Then, the next day (Christmas day) is filled with food and family. There is very little music and spirit of Christmas.”

The last example about Christmas and how culture has influenced or impacted the experience of these missionaries is in the story related by the Philippines missionary. He writes:

We bought food at the grocery store for a bunch of people in the area and our cart was packed and while standing at the checkout line, I heard two people behind me gossiping in a different language – ‘those rich foreigners just buy whatever they want, just anytime, living a comfortable lifestyle...’ Then I turned to them and told them to put their food with mine, and we paid for all of their groceries, and said, ‘Merry Christmas!’ They were giddy and laughing nervously and thanking us profusely.

He continues to relate his Christmas experience by also saying, “Christmas night, we took our Ukulele out and stood on a busy street corner and caroled Christmas hymns, and we had so many people stop and take pictures. Then we walked through the neighborhoods and people came out of their homes, mothers with babies on hip, and dads in their pajamas, smiling and singing along. We handed out candy to everyone walking by.” This missionary notes and observes the cultural differences and the different ways the Filipino people react to the actions of the missionaries, but he does not seem to dwell on it. He focuses more on his own actions, without a lot of cultural commentary.

Food

Food is a large part of any society or experience. While evaluating the missionary blogs, I was able to see how food was discussed and what role it played in the lives of the missionaries. Comments about food are prevalent throughout most of the entries. Cape Verde states “So, on the topic of interesting... African Food... that once picky version of me would never eat.” He goes on to discuss his first experience with eating and cooking eel and getting tips from others about the preparation and what to get or not to get. There are also many comments and discussions about trying to replicate or emulate “food from home” or food that one misses that cannot be obtained in the country they are currently residing. Cape Verde comments, “In the spirit of 4th of July, we decided to get some ground beef and make hamburgers and make our own French Fries.” He clarifies, “it wasn’t as good as a BBQ one at home, but it was still a good

change from the rice, chicken, spaghetti, egg, and whatever else we eat.” Clearly, the eating habits of this missionary have changed, but also, it is something that he realizes has changed about his personality, or habits in general.

Kenya also talks about the differences in food and eating habits. Kenya talks about going to a village meeting and being offered some “tasty goat meat” from a huge pot. It seems to be mentioned as it was an unusual experience, but really shows the customs and culture of what is consumed in different locations. Another instance of wanting to partake or create food from home is related by Kenya who states he celebrated an anniversary by going out “to a real legit PIZZA place.” He goes on to relate, “It was so nice! Only problem was I haven’t had that much cheese in a long time so I was a little sick afterwards... but it was way worth it!!” Not only did the habits of this missionary change, but he realized that his body and appetites had changed as well. Later he recounts another experience with eating pizza to have variety, or remind himself of home and states, “It had too much flavor and cheese. It destroyed my stomach. I’m going back to food with no flavor.” This is interesting because he seems to spend as much time talking about the food he eats in Kenya as describing how often he tries to obtain food from home and how it inevitably makes him sick. Food also plays a part in the cultural habits of people in Kenya. Kenya discusses going to an event and states: “They treated us like kings, and they gave us a ton of food! Chapatis, rice, chicken, ndengu, and all sorts of stuff.” He continues to comment that “we get fed by just about every person that we see.” This is a clear picture of how food plays into the cultural habits of the people in Kenya.

Argentina discusses food and makes observations about the customs and habits in the same breath. He remarks, “The food here is pretty darn good. My favorite things are either Alfajores or empanadas con jamon y queso. We eat a lot of pasta here. I don’t understand how

people here are so skinny when they eat tons of carbs and take naps right after.” Argentina also has his own experience with missing food from home or trying to capture the same feelings and flavor. He comments, “The ice cream here is good, it’s just missing something. American ice cream is where it is at.”

Tokyo talks about the same themes of both noticing what is different and how it is connected to culture and celebrations while also always remarking if she has been able to partake of something that was “from home.” She writes about a going to a festival where “everyone’s just walking around and eating food.” She further talks about making food with different people and how this is part of their relationship or experience with the Japanese people. In the same entry she comments, “I had cold-stone ice cream and a turkey sandwich on wheat bread. I felt SO at home, it was great. They don’t sell turkey here at all. I haven’t been able to get my daily sandwich fix in awhile.” She associates food with both her memories from home as well as the experiences and relationships she is developing while in Japan. In a later entry Tokyo writes, “We got sushi at a sushi-go-around, and it was all really yummy but the last thing I ate was one of the weirdest and grossest things I’ve ever had. I had to finish it though, because we’re in Japan and you finish everything you put on your plate.” This comment relates not only to her food experience, but other cultural observations connected and based around food.

Sweden talks about the food he eats connected to the holidays and celebrations. He writes that he hopes everyone has recovered from the food and holiday festivities and are doing well unless, as he states, “you had as many Swedish meatballs as I did, then you’re probably still struggling.” Regardless of what food it is, if it is connected to holidays, there is inherent culture in these celebrations.

Rio talks about food by discussing the appointments and interactions she has and the food she eats with various people. She comments that at lunch she had Brazilian Churrasco and learned how to cut and prepare the meat. She also mentions the eating habits related to holidays and cultural traditions by observing that for Christmas in Brazil, “they have a huge meal on Christmas Eve at midnight on Christmas Eve/morning. Then, the next day is filled with food and family.” She talks about how food is part of celebrations and a part of gatherings and interactions with others.

Cebu also talks about food and how it is an important element of his time in the Philippines. The most significant story he relates is the experience already cited in this study, regarding buying groceries for people in the area after the devastating typhoon. It is something that should be mentioned in relation to how important food is to the people in Cebu and the surrounding areas and the conceptions held by the people regarding visitors or foreigners. The significant line in that encounter is “Those rich foreigners just buy whatever they want, just anytime, living a comfortable lifestyle.” The story has already been cited, but shows how food was something important and valuable. Also, the actions and habits of the foreigners was reflected in what they purchased and the quantities purchased.

South Africa talks about her experiences with holidays, celebrations, and how food is important and plays a role in these gatherings. She notes, “The Elders braaied (grilled) a lot of meat and everyone from the branch brought side dishes. I love South African food. I’ve been fed more in the two weeks I’ve been here than in all my time in Bots.” This is significant as she is also doing a comparison of South Africa traditions and habits to the other places she has been in Africa itself. South Africa also mentions eating hamburgers and milkshakes as part of her Christmas celebrations. She mentions this as a way to make it stand out from the food she

generally eats at this point in her mission. This is also connected to a further experience she talks about. She and other missionaries sang Christmas carols to various people in their area as a way to share their traditions of Christmas. Someone working at a pizza restaurant requested for them to come there and after the carols were sung, he gave them two free pizzas. There can be a connection there between someone working for a place that has typically American food and wanting American Christmas carols to be sung to him. South Africa also relates language and cultural differences through observations about a certain treat that people started selling when the weather was hot. She notes that they sell things called Freezits, which are “little ice pop things.” However, because of the differences in language, sometimes the items appear to be “Free Zits” but no one locally seems to mind this. Only the missionary notices or thinks this is a deterrent for buying the items.

Later in the entries, South Africa writes about another cultural experience that directly involves food. She recounts that a member of the local church community invited a group of missionaries over for dinner. She writes, “We get there all excited to eat ‘cause his wife is an awesome cook. But then they told us that we were cooking! What?? They told us that there was a whole chicken defrosting and we could use whatever else we could find and we had to make dinner.” It is clear from the language used that this shocked South Africa and the others with her. She relates that everyone was fine and “no one was offended” which indicates that these actions might be offensive in another place, country, or situation.

Rome talks about food consistently throughout her narrative. Italy is known for its food, so whether this is done intentionally or just because the food experienced was so different than what she is used to, it is not something that can be determined based on her writings. Rome talks about eating lasagna on Thanksgiving. She also relates a story from Christmas Eve where she

goes to a house for dinner and follows the Italian tradition of eating “lots and lots of fish.” This is something that neither Rome nor her companion really enjoys, but is very traditional, which she emphasizes throughout the story. She notes that they had determined they could eat anything but fish and were met with a buffet of fish. She writes, “Everything is fish. Seafood salad, fried octopus, fish bread. The only things that don’t look fishy are the fried mushrooms, fried cheese, and a fruit salad.” Later, she realizes that here is even “fish juice on the oranges.” This story also recounts how even though the American participants did not like fish and were terrified of most of the entrees, they tried to eat or made an effort to look like they were eating and enjoying everything. Rome also mentions in passing, “we tried to make Mexican food but we had to use parmesan cheese. You can imagine how that turned out.” This is another instance of the American or foreign missionary trying to replicate familiar or comfortable food in the new country. She also notes that while she is teaching some children they tell her the glue stick looks like mozzarella. She writes, “That’s why I love Italy because everything ties back to mozzarella.” It is obvious that food plays a dominant role in the culture and lives of Italians and those who live in Italy for even a short time.

Rome further discusses eating in Italy and how food and meals are an important part of the culture and interactions. She talks about one experience when someone invited her for dinner. She stated that she really didn’t have time, but the person insisted. Rome writes, “you just can’t say no to Italians for dinner so she made us stay promising it would be ten minutes and then she would give us a ride home, which turned into two hours of dinner (which actually hadn’t been cooked yet) salad, bread, then gelato... but that’s just how it is.” Rome also talks about the change of season and how that changes the food consumed by most people. She states, “In the summer everyone eats pasta salad with a mixture of whatever they have: peas, corn, hot dogs,

tuna, pickles, peppers, olives, eggs, eggplant, and other things.” She notes that they have had that every time they go to eat at someone’s house during the summer. Rome also later comments more about the importance of meals and cultural habits in Italy. She writes that she was late to another appointment because she did not plan ahead enough or allow enough time for lunch. She comments, “We KNOW that you just can’t do a lunch appointment in 2 ½ hours in Italy. Even though President made a one hour rule and we try so hard to do it in an hour, you just can’t tell Sicilians that you have only one hour to eat.”

Taiwan talks about food and his lack of what he craves, or his necessities in Taiwan. He writes that he would like “anything with chocolate.” Another experience he relates is how people are fed in Taiwan and the customs that are polite or a part of having a meal with the people. He talks about being sick after a dinner with a Taiwanese family and says, “She made too much food. Every time we would stop eating she would say (hai mei chi wan le!) meaning there was still food there to eat. I felt so so sick.” This shows the interaction between the missionary and the people in Taiwan and the expectations around food and meals. He goes back to longing for American food as he notes for Thanksgiving that he had some turkey and mashed potatoes but also that American holidays are obviously not the same.

Language

As visitors to another country, the LDS missionaries are expected to learn the language for the country they are residing in and be able to communicate and talk to the people who reside there. In some instances, there are multiple languages, as the missionary in South Africa experienced. However, for the most part, the American missionary is taught to focus on being able to speak one language other than English and communicate to the local people in their native tongues. As foreigners, or Americans, this also provides them with the opportunity to

teach English classes to those desiring to learn English. Many of the missionaries mention teaching English and it becomes a part of their habits and lives as missionaries.

Cape Verde talks about how he encounters not only Portuguese which is the main language in Cape Verde, but also Creole and other languages and dialects. This isn't as prominent for Cape Verde as for some of the missionaries in other countries, but language is a factor in most of the missionaries' experiences as described in their blog entries.

Kenya relates that there are different dialects and languages in the different areas or regions that he resides. He mentions that different tribes do not understand one another and how that impacts talking to people and interacting with them. He meets one person who is from a different tribe in Western Kenya and does not understand the "Mkamba" who are the main tribe. He also observes that this is better for him as a missionary because that person did not have the same beliefs or ideals that the Mkamba did regarding missionaries. Later, he is moved to another area and is grateful that in his new area "they speak a lot of Swahili, so that is really nice so I will be able to learn it faster." It is definitely difficult to communicate about your beliefs or anything else if you do not speak the same language as the people around you. He observes in another entry, "Members are awesome when it comes to teaching, especially in Kenya for a few reasons. One is obviously language. I'm still working on my Kiswahili, but only know a little bit, just enough to get by on the streets. But members really help with teaching and clarifying in both Kiswahili and Luya." This demonstrates that while Kenya is trying to learn and communicate in the native languages of Kenya, it is difficult to do so without some external help. Kenya also relates a story in which he was trying to state that someone wanted to be a doctor, but inadvertently said that the person wanted to be a witchdoctor. He relates this story to make fun of

himself, but it shows how important language is to communicate accurately and effectively with people and that language is an important part of his cultural experience.

Argentina notes that learning the language and adapting it to those he meets is what challenges him. He writes, “Chileans talk a lot faster than Argentines. It’s like how Californians talk basically.” He further writes that even though he is in a country where everything is foreign, including the language, he is, “the happiest he has ever been.” This shows that language is an important and useful tool, but also something that clearly develops over time.

Tokyo talks about the language and the interactions she has with the people in Japan based on the language. She writes, “Chiba is so great! About half the members seem to speak English and everyone is patient and kind!” She is enthusiastic about the people who she is interacting with and is also grateful for the presence of English which facilitates communication even more. Another observation from Tokyo deals with the representation of English in Japan. She writes, “In Japan some clothes have English writing on them, however the majority of them make no sense at all.” English is popular and something people in Japan are drawn to, based on the interactions of Tokyo. She mentions running into people at an international university and writes, “Everyone is studying English and was super stoked to talk to an American!” The bridge of English helped her to connect to the people in Japan.

Sweden talks about working and living in a diverse area of Sweden where “most of the people are either devout Muslims, or cannot speak Swedish or English.” This makes it hard to communicate with them or interact as a missionary. He further writes a few entries later, “I have had tons of lessons with Nigerians, people from Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Uganda, Syria, Columbia, Chile, Honduras, Italy, and basically all over. All kinds of people except Swedes.... The biggest obstacle thus far is just being able to communicate with so many people from

different places with different languages.” He is enthusiastic in his writing and comments, but realistically relates the difficulties in learning and communicating in a variety of languages.

Rio relates her struggle with the language and connecting to the people in Brazil in the area of Campo Grande. She writes, “I am speaking Portuguese quite comfortably now, but many people in Camp Grande were like ‘she talks with a weird accent, therefore she is stupid, therefore I will only talk to the Brazilian.’” She is clearly frustrated with her inability to communicate with the people in this particular area, and even though she has learned Portuguese, the language is still a prominent factor in this frustration.

Cebu talks about going to a new area with a new language, other than the one he first learned upon arrival in Cebu. He writes, “They speak a different form of Bisaya with new words, so I’m still getting used to it, but I love it. They have like a tone when they talk.” He makes these observations not out of frustration but simply to note the differences. He recognizes that not knowing the language can hinder him while communicating with the people in that area. Cebu also writes about an encounter with someone from Spain who didn’t know any English. He writes that he uses his best high school Spanish, but also knows he has “such a Cebuano accent.” Nonetheless, he uses all of the language skills at his disposal to form a bond and connection with this person from Spain.

South Africa switches back and forth between the countries of Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia, so she has a clear disadvantage when it comes to learning the native language of the people she is living among and teaching. She writes that she says the wrong word at the wrong time, and tries to just communicate with everyone in English. She also notices the differences in how the various people speak English. She notes, “When Zambians speak English, most of the time they switch the L and the R. So fries are flies, etc.” She notes that this habit is so common

among the people who she interacts with the most that she eventually starts doing the same thing. She accidentally switches the two letters in her words and phrases all the time. She comments, “I’m going to sound so weird by the time I go home.” It is because of the language limitations that South Africa is limited to teaching or communicating mostly with people who speak English. She relates that one woman was pleasant and stated she knew English, however, when they asked her a descriptive question she replied, “31.” It was at this point that South Africa realized the person didn’t really speak English and they would not be able to communicate with her. South Africa also writes about living with other missionaries from other countries in Africa and how she takes advantage of that opportunity to learn additional tribal languages. She writes, “There are seven of us in the same flat... Three of the sisters all speak Xhosa. It’s a South African language with clicks in it. There are three different types of clicks in Xhosa... I have been practicing. By the time we aren’t companions anymore, I’ll be a pro.”

Taiwan comments that his language skills are improving, which is helping him to communicate with the people in Taiwan. He also notes that as a missionary, they all chose a Taiwanese name to go by while there because it is too hard for the Taiwanese people to pronounce foreign or American names. It also builds a connection to the language and the culture. Later, as he meets someone else with the same Taiwanese name that he has, he is ecstatic and enthusiastic about the connection. He writes, “My mission given name is super rare so that is really cool to have another Ding in my home ward.”

Other Observations

There are so many cultural observations and elements among the narratives of the missionary blogs that it was impossible to categorize them all. Therefore, I have this category to include the interesting and noteworthy observations on culture that do not fit into the other

categories but still show the ways in which the missionaries have observed the people and culture they are a part of.

Kenya talks about the difference in rules of courtesy or timing. He relates that there was a memorial service for someone who had died in the local congregation. He was there on time. Thirty minutes later the local congregation leader arrived. An hour later only four people had shown up, but the person who was supposed to bring the body never did. Kenya notes “we wasted almost the entire day. I was pretty upset.” Time is an issue that comes up more than once during Kenya’s narrative. He writes about another experience where one person told him to go visit a few people and it would only take an hour to get to them. He later writes “unfortunately, we forgot where we were... In Africa more importantly Kenya! If someone tells you an amount of time, you need to multiply it by about 5 and then you have the real answer. We ended up biking 40 miles that day!”

He talks about meeting with a family who comes to church, but not all at once. The husband and wife and kids do not all come to church together and he states, “It’s like a cultural thing where someone always has to stay at the house.. so they alternate coming to church.” As his goal is to have the entire family come to church, this is hard for Kenya to understand, but something that is implemented with this family. Kenya later comments that he had a week full of “really weird things, but hey that’s Kenya for you.” He notes that he was offered drugs on the street, got punched by someone passing him, and had some drunk men join them in missionary work. These comments are all in the same entry and supposedly support his comment about weird things happening in Kenya.

The first sentence of the first entry written by Argentina states, “I would just like to tell everyone that Argentina is pretty ghetto. Well not ghetto, more like second world. I walk in dirt

roads every day! It's pretty great!" Even though the tone and language used to describe Argentina are not very flattering, it seems like the missionary is still enthusiastic about being there. He also talks about another experience involving gunshots. He writes, "We saw three police pickup trucks with people on the back with shotguns and masks over their faces. About 30 minutes later, we heard gunshots." They make the determination to move in the opposite direction. Another incident related by Argentina is about a person who robbed a restaurant next door to the church and then comes into the church to hide. He is caught and the comment from Argentina is simply, "Weird stuff happens in Argentina." In a later entry, Argentina talks about how a little boy pulled a gun on him and asked for his money. He recounts, "Lame thing was, it was a toy gun. It looked so fake that I can't even explain. We just kept walking and they left us alone."

Argentina writes about being sent to a near area called Villa o Sea and states it is a place where "people get robbed, stabbed, and shot." In the next entry he comments, "I didn't get robbed, shot, or stabbed this week. I did hear a lot of gun shots." With all of these gun encounters and other experiences, Argentina draws the following conclusion: "This country is so corrupt and the government too. I give this country 20 years until it falls or something happens. But at least the people are super nice, well most are though. The culture here is kinda European, but at the same time Latino." The last comment Argentina makes out of the entries pulled for this study are these, "I heard about 50 gunshots outside of our apartment on Saturday. That was pretty exciting. This country is crazy, love it."

Rio talks about meeting with a Brazilian who had a dream and comments on how common this is among Brazilians. She writes, "I don't know what is with Brazilians and dreams, but it seems to be a theme recently!"

Tokyo relates a story on the subway that occurs between two Japanese men. She observes, “Japan has no garbage, and no violence, and everyone’s so friendly!” She went on to tell about an encounter on the subway where one guy accidentally gets his foot caught in someone else’s bag, and starts kicking it around to disentangle himself from the bag. Then the guy sits down next to the bag owner and Tokyo is nervous that a fight or something else will break out, but instead, “they are all of a sudden friends and one is slapping the other’s knee and then they are sharing mints.” She relates that this whole experience confused her and she didn’t really understand what happened. Tokyo also makes observations about the Japanese people and different characteristics. While eating one day, she observes a man who almost jumps out of a five story building with the intent to commit suicide. The police and other rescue workers get there in time, but this prompts the missionary to state, “It really freaked me out, not just in the sense that people are so unhappy with their lives that they want to jump off a building, but also the fact that they don’t understand where they are going or why they are here in the first place. I’m pretty sure statistics say that Japan is one of the most depressed countries in the world.”

Sweden also talks about the area he is in and the characteristics of the Swedish people. In one of the first entries he writes, “We are assigned to the Stockholm south area, more specifically, Hagersten. If there is a ghetto place in Sweden, this is probably it.” He also continues to talk about the area and the culture he finds. In the passage about the different cultures and languages he has encountered in Sweden he writes, “I have been serving in Sweden for about two weeks now, have taught many lessons, and only one of those lessons has been with an actual Swede.” He also notes, “The diversity here among the poverty is actually such a blessing. I had this idea that I’d be teaching blonde haired blue eyed meatball loving people for two years but I was sooooo wrong.” This shows the diversity of Sweden as well as the

misconceptions about that diversity the missionary had before he actually resided there. Sweden also relates another story about the experience of people in Sweden by talking about an experience a friend has. He writes, “Some gangster thug tried to beat him up yesterday, so that was interesting.” In most of his narrative, Sweden focuses on the diversity and different people of Sweden. There may have been more or less diversity in different times of his mission, but during the entries reviewed, it is clear his experience is changing how he views Sweden and the people who live there.

Rio writes and observes various aspects about Brazil and the culture. In one of the earliest entries she writes, “It is VERY easy to focus on all of the things I legitimately HATE about Brazil. HATE. I am seriously LOATHING the sticky floors and cockroaches/ants/snails/spiders/gnats/mosquitos. Other things that I can’t stand- dogs mating in the streets, kittens dying on the ‘sidewalks,’ the uneven streets, garbage everywhere, rivers of sewage, NOISE, etc...” This passage shows the culture shock Rio experiences and the things that stand out as different or are not what she is accustomed to. Rio also discusses getting sick and writes, “Hospitals in Brazil are definitely not a sterile environment, and I definitely doubted the education of the VERY young doctors.” She continues to write about her hospital experience and cites lack of communication skills and the ability to discuss how she is feeling and what is wrong with her in a way that could allow the medical professionals in Brazil to assist her. She also comments, “I am not one to hide details about dead birds, cats, and dogs in the middle of the street or how they are honestly very few things about Brazil that I love, and how I don't have the desire to return to this corner of the world...”

Rio also recounts an experience that led to some tension and misunderstanding between her and a member of the local church congregation in her area. Rio writes that she had a lunch

appointment with this person but couldn't remember where the house was as she was "trying to process the language and dodging dying kittens in the street." She continues and writes that she attempted to call the appointment and various other people to find or locate the address of the house, but no one answered their phones. Eventually, she gave up and did not show up for the appointment. Later, the appointment called and was very upset with her for her rudeness. Also, various other members in the mission and congregation were upset with her because of the missed appointment. As she concludes this story she observes, "I tried to apologize and explain the situation, but Brazilians seem to have little sympathy for a directionally challenged American missionary who is training a green missionary with only 11 weeks in Brazil herself."

In a later entry, Rio also touches on her constant sickness again and going to the doctors multiple times to get a change in prescription and other things. She is advised by the wife of her mission president to stay in the house all day and to drink five liters of water. She writes "we sent her some information on water toxicity, and when too much is harmful." She implies that while the person may have been trying to help, the ideas and suggestions of the Brazilians are not something useful to her. She recounts another illness and writes, "We had the 'joy' of going to a public hospital. It was very interesting to observe how things are run down here, but I didn't touch anything or sit close to anybody!" It is clear she is distancing herself from the practices of at least the medical world. In one of her last entries, Rio writes that she has an American companion and comments, "I feel like things are so much easier when you have the same culture."

Cebu writes about his experience with knocking on doors in a specific neighborhood and the reactions of the people he encounters. He recounts, "One day we stood outside the gates not knowing what to expect, the guards let us in, and then the owner sees us and kicks us out and

sends the dogs on us, rude. Needless to say, that was not a Filipino. Filipinos are much kinder about their rejection.” He later writes about going to a new area and the experience he has when first meeting the people there. The full passage has great descriptors of culture and habits of the people living on the small island he goes to:

Taking a boat to the small, tropical Apo island and stepping onto the beach barefoot, with my shoes and socks in another hand. The water is crystal cleeeear blue. Put my socks and shoes back on and walk down a path into a small village, little filipino squint-smiles greeting you "Welcome to Apo!" and waving and little kids running to the windows of their school-classroom to say hello, a man playing the ukulele, lets me borrow it, I play and sing and a group of 20 kids gathers around us, we go on our way and meet new people, nicest on earth, walking through a clean little jungle village with vines hanging down, white cement houses and white sand beaches, introducing ourselves and teaching the gospel.

Cebu writes in a later entry, “I just realized again how much I love Filipinos. They are honestly the best people in the world. Just the nicest.” His observations show that he appreciates the Filipino people and their habits and culture.

South Africa writes about some unique experiences that happen while she is in Zambia. She relates that there was a riot at the police station. She thinks it was probably something related to some corrupt police or that maybe a prisoner escaped. However, that was not what happened. She writes that there had been a little girl who had seen a mermaid in her toilet. Her parents called the police to come check it out. After the further investigation, the mermaid wasn't found. The little girl's parents got angry at the police because they thought that the police had stolen the mermaid and were holding it hostage. The mom then gathered all of her friends and neighbors to storm the police station and free the mermaid. South Africa concludes by saying, “I sincerely wish I was kidding about this. There was literally a riot over a toilet mermaid.”

South Africa also relates about a sickness she contracts and writes, “I don't know what it is but Africa seems to bring out the worst in my health. I get sick way too often here. We are

going to see a doctor tomorrow and hopefully I will be fine soon!” She doesn’t really talk about her sickness or things that bother her health again, even though she alludes to having health issues frequently while in Africa. South Africa also recounts another story where she is teaching someone on the side of the road when someone driving by stops and says, “That book! I need that book!” She gives him the book she has and then the man speeds off cheering. It is not clear why the book was wanted or what happened to the man. There are various other stories of encounters with interesting people, or people who stand out because of their appearance, actions, and mannerisms.

An experience that talks about how Italians and other nationalities react to things is when Rome writes about almost getting robbed. She notes that she usually is good about keeping her bag in front of her and preventing robberies but she had a lot of things she was juggling and wasn’t as vigilant as normal. She went to put her phone in her bag and caught the hand of the girl who had been trying to rob her. At the same time, a Bangladeshi man warned her that the girl behind her was trying to rob her. After the robber gets off, an Italian guy comments that he noticed the robbing girl, as well. The Bangladeshi man asks why the Italian didn’t say anything. The Italian said, “I got robbed by her last week and no one said anything.”

Another significant lesson in culture and tradition happens when a group of missionaries in Italy volunteer to do a service project that involves cleaning up a street. There are both men and women involved. However, Rome recounts that every time any of the women try to pick up a tool to help with the clean up the leaders would say, “Don’t touch that, I don’t want you to hurt yourself.” The leaders then proceeded to explain that the job of the women was to hold a vest for the people serving and to spread Nutella on bread. Rome attributes these regulations to “Italian gender rules.”

Rome also writes about meeting a woman who is “the textbook definition of a Sicilian woman: she force fed us cookies, spoke in a dialect, and then slapped my behind on the way out the door.” Later she talks about meeting a man who asks what the difference in their religions is. Rome tries to explain the difference between her religion and Catholicism and he decides they are just non-practicing Catholics. The nuanced differences are not something he can comprehend because in Italy, everyone is Catholic. Rome writes, “Everyone in Sicilia is really nice and really open to talk, but even people who have doubts about their faith or believe their church is corrupt still don’t want to meet with us. It’s a lot about tradition here.” She also continues to discuss how nice the Italians are and writes, “We talked to this old man who invited us to his house for water and to meet his whole family...almost everyone is like that here.” In a later entry she comments, “I love Italy because I love Italians and I love teaching Italians because you can just be so HONEST with them.” She also writes how much she loves Italy, the people, and the culture in a majority of her entries over the course of just the six months of entries pulled for this study. In one of her last comments she writes, “I appreciate the little things about Italy like the old man at the ward party explaining to me in detail how you make tomato sauce, and how much I love talking to people in Italian, everything just seems so much sweeter.”

Taiwan talks about his experiences with the people, culture, and teaching English in Taiwan. He observes the inconsistencies in the standard of living and observes, “USA has a way higher than average standard of living. Though like every single person here has iPhones, even though they don’t have running water, so I guess that was their choice.” He also talks about a cultural group he encounters and writes, “Taidon does have a lot of uan zhu min (native) people there. They are pretty cool, kind of strange clothes, amazing rituals, some of the folks there are

really scary and carry pointy sticks and knives everywhere they go.” He is observing the differences in the habits and people just among the people in Taiwan.

Basic Necessities

Regardless of whether the missionaries were in developed or developing countries, the standard of living or access to amenities that they were used to was different for them across the various countries represented in this study. This was commented upon enough to be deemed a noteworthy category or theme of conversation throughout the narratives.

Cape Verde writes about walking in most of his areas. He writes, “Our church is a solid 20 minute walk away from our area, which wouldn’t be a big problem except that in Bela Vista, water only enters the town on Sunday morning. That means, everyone is fetching water, washing clothes/dishes, cleaning their houses, taking showers, and storing water for the next week, all right before church.” He indicates that this hinders people getting to church as well as being able to get everything done they need to do, all to accommodate the water schedule.

Kenya writes about water as well. He relates the experience of filling up a baptismal font and a tank with water from an outside hose in some areas. However, in other places he does not even have access to a hose, but has to use buckets to fill tanks by hand. In the instance of using a font for a baptism, after it is over, Kenya notes, “Then we had to tip over the font and it was like 800 pounds, and almost killed someone in the process. Took ten guys to tip it.” Kenya also talks about power outages. He comments, “Sorry I don't have a lot of time to write, power has gone out four times today and it’s not so reliable at the moment.” Kenya also discusses how difficult it is to communicate or stay in touch with people by commenting, “They just go missing because there is no way to get ahold of them because most of them don’t have phones.” What Kenya is used to from home is not what he encounters in Kenya.

Argentina doesn't dwell on the lack of necessities or utilities as much as some of the other missionaries. He does remark in passing, "Argentina is kind of lame with computers and I can't send pictures every week." He doesn't elaborate beyond that.

Sweden writes about the constant and persistent presence of bed bugs. Sweden relates that every night he receives hundreds of bites and uses bug spray as a way to try to get some sleep. In a later entry, he mentions them again. He writes, "They are in everything!!" Also, he notes that he has bites everywhere and is slightly embarrassed when he is walking around. However, he mentions them over the course of several weeks and does not seem to be doing anything else to eradicate them from his living quarters. Sweden also discusses the convenience of phones and cell phones, but it is related to the conveniences allowed missionaries. He writes, "Our mission received iphones this week and I have to say it's a lot nicer asking 'Siri' where things are instead of pulling out a huge map in the middle of the city that takes two people to hold. For the missionaries in Sweden, it wasn't that the people they were communicating with didn't have cell phones; it was that they did not have the tools they needed to communicate and locate the people around them.

Rio writes about a lack of modern appliances or conveniences she is used to from home by noting, "every time we use the washing machine, the 'septic system' backs up and seeps feces infested water inside." This of course, makes washing clothes difficult and different from what she is used to. She also writes, "I miss clean floors and being able to flush toilet paper. I miss my country and my home." It is very hard for Rio to adapt or not consistently notice the things that are different from her home. This leads her to discuss it or talk about it more. However, in one of the later entries she writes, "I feel unusually calm and completely at peace. The fact that our shower is still cold and our toilet doesn't flush isn't driving me crazy anymore." Along the

way, she seemed to accept the way things worked in Rio and was able to not dwell on what she didn't have as much as she clearly had before.

South Africa talks about power outages that happen consistently over the course of her different areas and the narrative itself. She writes that the power goes on and off for periods of time, while cooking or preparing something important. They just have to wait it out. She also comments on washing her clothes by writing, "Did I ever tell you about the fancy washing machine we have at our flat? Here's how it works: You put two buckets in a bathtub. You fill one with clean water and one with soapy water. Then there are these magical things called hands. You use them to wash the clothes. It is pretty cutting edge technology." South Africa relates this method with humor, but also points out the inconveniences of such a process.

Transportation

Most familiar images of an LDS missionary include two people riding around on bicycles. This is because for the most part, missionaries live as economically as possible. Throughout the blog entries, the different transportation methods used by the missionaries is reflective of the country they live in and they explain how they have adapted to what is the most convenient and common in that country.

Kenya writes, "We spent the whole day biking around and taking matatus to get around. It was a really tiresome day." He talks about not only just relying on bicycles to get around, but matatus, which are basically buses or public transportation. Kenya also writes about when the tire on his bicycle exploded and they did not have any transportation. He had to walk everywhere and at one point "a tractor came by with a trailer on the back, so what did we do? We flagged it down and got a ride up the hill." This demonstrates not only how the missionaries got around in Kenya, but how they were treated or helped along the way. In another entry, Kenya also

comments about the location of the church and how the location impacts the various members who want to go there. He writes: It's difficult for a lot of the less active members here because the church is so far away from them. "It is more than a 45 minute walk. It is really crazy how many trials the members here have. With distance and lack of resources and also persecution from others, it is amazing that members here still come to church."

Sao Paolo writes about walking home and then almost walking into a bus. This caught the bus driver's attention and then they were offered a ride home. She noted that it was a Sunday and since they didn't want to spend money on Sunday they just told him they didn't have money at that moment. The bus driver told them to get in anyways and gave them a ride home.

Tokyo talks about being stuck without their bicycles, the main form of transportation because they parked in a "no parking zone." They didn't understand what had happened to the bicycles or where they were. They went in search of someone who could help them find the bicycles and understand what had happened to them. This led them to discovering that the place was closed and they did not have their bicycles for an entire week. This forced them to rely on public transportation and other methods to get around the city. This experience helped Tokyo to understand not only the alternative ways to get around in Tokyo, or get used to other forms of transportation, but it also helped her to become more familiar with the local laws for transportation and as a bicyclist.

Rio talks about receiving a ride home from a friend she meets and writes, "Picture 3 women, 2 small children shoved in the back of a VW rabbit, then add heat, the lack of driving rules, speed bumps, uneven roads, etc...NOT my favorite part of my mission!" Rio also talks about how hard it is for her to get around her area not just because of transportation but because of her lack of understanding the way things work. She comments, "Navigating is really difficult.

The roads here are a ramshackled mess with no apparent pattern for numbering houses. That, coupled with my amazing natural sense of direction has led to a lot of wandering/walking/asking people for directions.” Rio refers to this in other entries, as well. She admits her own lack of sense of direction, but also seems to never have a great understanding of the structure of the cities she is in.

Rio also mentions various public transportation experiences. On the way to a meeting with other missionaries, she has to take a bus which she describes as “three hours of hell. Public transportation is 106+ degrees on an un-airconditioned bus.” She also notes that it takes an additional four hours for her to return home on the same public transportation. Later, she talks about another public transportation experience. She writes, “I talked to the crazy lady sitting next to me, but she dominated the conversation and then started singing various gospel songs. It was a little strange. I definitely will not miss riding on public transportation.” Rio has clear issues with public transportation, and notes how difficult it is for her throughout most of her entries.

Cebu talks about how he walks to most places, but sometimes finds himself without a way to get home or transportation. He also notes that there is a lot of reliance on the kindness of the people he encounters. He recalls, “we kept walking for like an hour up into the mountains talking to everyone, so and then we realized we were lost and VERY far from home and we hadn’t seen a motor in awhile, so we said a prayer and said, ‘please send us a motorcycle.’ Within two minutes, a motor came driving by and stopped.” They were then given a ride home by a woman who said she had rented a house to someone who was Mormon a decade earlier and she had been nice, so she would give them a ride.

South Africa writes that she walks everywhere and comments on the benefits of walking. She observes, “Walking really helps you learn the area faster! In a car, if you take a wrong turn

you just u-turn and you are back on track! When you are walking, it takes a long time to get back on track so you make sure you go the right way. But it is also fun to be able to talk to people on the way.” She also notes how difficult it is to be walking when it rains and the streets turn to rivers. A few months later, in a later entry, South Africa notes that she gets a car. She has to be the one to drive it because the other missionaries don’t know how to drive a stick shift. She comments, “I’m so grateful that I learned before I came out. I would not want to be learning for the first time on *Zambian streets*. *Zambians are crazy drivers*.” However, she notes how nice it is to have a car and how they can get around much faster.

Rome writes about moving from Rome to Sicily and the trip she takes on a train to do so. She describes a 12 hour train ride that goes down the coast and had a view of the ocean the entire way. Also, once at the tip of Italy, the entire train is loaded onto a boat to be taken to Sicily. She comments, “It is also really fun because when you are on such a long train ride you make friends with everyone on the cabin and have really great gospel discussions (they really can’t run away can they?)” Rome also recounts walking everywhere and talking to everyone they encounter each time they do. She also writes about taking the bus when she needs to go somewhere else and sometimes getting stuck places because she doesn’t know when the bus is coming again or where exactly she is. However, she also notes that when she has been lost or confused, there are usually people around to help “flag down a bus for us.”

Taiwan talks about using a bicycle to get around in relation to how bad he is at riding one. He recounts, “I crashed on my bike pretty bad this week!... My bike tried to change gears on me while I was standing up to pedal higher. I lost complete balance and went down.” He goes on to relate that he isn’t so great on a bicycle and he hopes he doesn’t get sent somewhere where it is even busier than where he is at the time of that entry.

Religion

Another category that presented itself was discussions of religion and how native beliefs or religious beliefs were discussed or portrayed throughout the missionary narratives. As missionaries, they would want to focus on their own religious beliefs, but the ways in which religion was discussed seemed to be more a discussion of the culture or the value systems of the people than just a simple difference of beliefs or ideas. It is clear from the language used that some of the missionaries do not understand different religions and attribute these differences or lack of understanding to the cultural differences. Kenya talks about an experience praying where someone says “next time we meet let us say to each other ‘HEY LORD’ we thank you for the gospel.” Kenya relates the story and then concludes it by saying, “the funny stuff that happens in KENYA!” It is clear he doesn’t attribute the actions of the individual to different ways of worshipping or different habits, but just to Kenya and the difference in culture.

Kenya also talks about the superstitious beliefs of the people in Kenya by relating a story of an interaction with one man. The man states that his family has become bewitched and asks the missionary to pray for them. The missionary then comments, “I had no idea what to say to him. Ha wow! But don’t worry this is a very common thing here in Kenya! People no joke believe this stuff. It’s crazy!” Kenya clearly doesn’t understand different belief systems or how different cultures have different systems of belief. Kenya goes on to describe something he observes and it is clear from his language and word choice that he looks at it through the lens of not just someone who has different beliefs or is a part of a different religion, but as someone who sees this other culture as separate and distanced from what is right in his world. He writes:

Also we saw a really crazy ADC (African divine church) rally/church meeting/ mosh pit/ march thing. ahahahh I don't even know how to really describe it. All I know is that some of the churches out here in Kenya are super crazy. Like the people had drums, flags, batons, and all sorts of other crazy stuff. They were marching down the road

singing crazy songs beating the drums and going crazy! Me and my companion were really scared! They weren't going to do anything to us (we think) but it was pretty crazy! People on the side of the road were just jumping in and joining in on the fun! hahah ohhhhhh Kenya.

These observations show how Kenya does not quite understand differences in culture or differences in religion and how religion impacts culture, but also that religious beliefs are simply different and therefore religious habits are different.

In contrast to these observations or this attitude, is the missionary in Sweden and how he describes religion and its culture in Sweden. First, he notices that the area he is in residing in is very diverse and so the culture he notices is different, but this is part of Sweden. He states, "Most of the people here are either devout Muslims or cannot speak Swedish or English well at all. So it makes it interesting!! The diversity here is huge!" He also categorizes the cultures he encounters in relation to their religious beliefs by observing: "We found three Nigerian investigators, which were definitely the highlight of the week. Their foundation is already built on Christ and they are such believing people! It has been a completely different experience thus far when meeting with a Swede." This shows that while Sweden notices the various religious beliefs of the people in Sweden, he also notices the differences in culture that comes from a country with a variety of different people and different nationalities. Sweden also seems to handle the differences in beliefs or inherent beliefs differently than the missionary in Kenya. In the following passage he talks about his experience with the Swedish people, who he has pointed out are mostly atheist. He writes: "We meet about one or two people every day, at most that believe in God. Some say they are atheist because they never had God growing up in Sweden and had really never thought about Him. Others because they thought God and the bible are just good story telling. There are several reasons. Darwinism was definitely a belief shared by many of them and life after this was not." He writes about the differences in religious beliefs that are

prevalent in Sweden based on the cultural standards and perceptions of the Swedish people. In relating these conversations, he notes how different their beliefs are to his own, but also observes why this is the case.

Sao Paolo talks about the different religious beliefs among the people she meets in Brazil and also the lack of religious tolerance or lack of support for family members who feel that they may want something different. She relates, “He sent us a message explaining that he had invited his brothers to his baptism and they started talking to him and telling him it was the wrong choice to make. They didn’t want to have any more to do with him. He started doubting his own ability to follow with faith, and he just got scared.” Sao Paolo also talks to another woman who is confused because she was raised Catholic and believes in a lot of the things she was taught, but was looking for something specific regarding authority. She decides to then go to another church that believes in reincarnation, but still is not sure what she believes and embraces all of her previous Catholic beliefs as well as other personal convictions. This woman did not seem to encounter as much resistance from those around her as the previous man had when it came to exploring her own religious beliefs and spirituality.

Tokyo talks about how she is received as a missionary in Japan. One person notes that the Mormons “always send out pretty girls to persuade people to join.” She further talks about other people she encounters who talk about their beliefs in Buddhism and sometimes relate their conversion stories from Buddhism to Christianity. Tokyo also notes that she meets someone from India who is Hindu, and her “religion and culture are very different from anything I’ve ever heard of.” Tokyo encounters religions she had never understood or thought of before and learns more about not just her own spirituality but that of those she meets and talks to.

Rio first mentions someone she is talking to from the “Assemblaya de Deus” a church she describes as a “particularly loud and obnoxious church down here.” She notes that most of the members of this church are more interested in arguing over doctrine than having respectful conversations about religion, but the man she meets is willing to sit down and talk to her. Rio also writes about a self-proclaimed “profeta” or prophet who becomes antagonistic towards the missionaries. She notes that the profeta was “stamping her feet and yelling that we weren’t Christians.” Later, Rio meets with a family who expresses interest in hearing about her religion even though the father has stated he has no interest in any religion and has never prayed before. However, the wife notes, “He is still a good husband, father, and grandfather.”

Cebu talks about meeting and getting to know different people from different countries and different religions while in the Philippines. He writes, “I taught a lesson to a Baptist preacher and met a girl from Denmark traveling the world by herself. It was so cool telling them about the church and just being friendly.” As a missionary he talked about and shared his beliefs, but also appreciated just becoming friends with the different people he encountered. Cebu also relates how people will run away from him if he approaches them and yell, “No! No! No! I have enough! I don’t need anymore! I’m content with my religion!” This is the standard reaction he gets as he tries to talk to people.

South Africa’s first entries are about the Christmas season and she talks about going to a pizza parlor and singing Christmas carols at the request of one of the workers there. The manager of the restaurant is so thrilled with this that he said he wants to talk about religion with the people there. South Africa also recounts an experience where a man followed them around for a little while and they were starting to get nervous. However, out of the blue he asks to talk to them and explains he had met someone who was a part of the LDS church before and was

interested but then didn't realize missionaries could be women as well and wanted to make sure they were missionaries before talking to them. This turned out to be good for the missionaries, but also made them nervous while being followed. During another instance, South Africa was walking down the street and they heard a car blaring a hymn of the LDS church. The man stopped and talked to them and he explained he "loved the Mormon Tabernacle Choir." He didn't really have an understanding of the religion or their beliefs, but loved the music. South Africa also recounts another man she meets who is studying theology and psychology. He talks about his church and how they had found the Book of Mormon and decided they liked it, so they used it in their church. He said as it was the only one they had ever found, it was valued and considered to be lucky to find one among their church members. As missionaries primarily just want to give away Book of Mormons, this thrilled South Africa.

In another entry, South Africa goes with someone she is teaching to a bible study at his church. They meet the prophet of his church who wanted to meet the LDS missionaries so he could help them understand that their church was wrong but his was right. South Africa writes, "Luckily everyone was very friendly so it wasn't like we were over there arguing or anything." She also attends a lecture at a university that they were invited to that was about Christianity and spirituality. She notes that the message was really good but, "the way it was delivered was kind of terrifying! The preacher yelled the entire thing!" It is obvious that the delivery or lectures she is used to are not of the same intensity nor done in the same manner.

South Africa also talks about passing a large church every day as it is near to where she lives. The preacher invites them in to take a tour of the church and she marvels at the pipe organ and how beautiful it was. She notes that the preacher got very excited when he finds out they are LDS because he loves the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He says that he would make some copies

of CDs he has for them. He was excited because of their common interests and what he appreciated, not because of any differences he saw.

Rome talks about her experiences in Italy and comments about the expectations or traditions of Italians that are built into their religious beliefs, but also how things are changing as the new generations grow up. She writes, “People told me that the problem with serving in Italy would be the traditions, but in reality the problem is that most people have been uninterested in religion and have given up on spirituality.” Rome talks about meeting a girl who had converted from Christianity to Islam and comments about how interesting that is. She remarks again how the best thing about being a missionary is just talking to people and learning more about their spirituality. Rome discusses the common beliefs or things a lot of Italians like or value. She notes that she talked to one woman who talked to the missionaries and then wanted to keep talking about how Padre Pio is an apostle. Rome notes, “Italians love Padre Pio.”

Rome meets a girl from Iran who wants to hear about Christianity and what the foundations are as she comes from a Muslim background and knows nothing about it. Rome comments, “I’ve never taught someone without a Christian background, so I’ve been learning a lot for myself about Jesus Christ and his role and his life.” Later in her narrative, Rome mentions this girl again and notes that while the girl is interested in getting baptized, they cannot allow her to do so because she would be in danger as a Christian in Iran and they cannot encourage her to do so. Rome also talks to some people from Denmark who note that in their country, people do not get baptized or join a religion because they are religious. They only get baptized to “get money from their relatives.” Rome observes that this girl “isn’t an atheist, but she just has never had a relationship with God.” Rome also asks the girl if she has ever prayed before and the girl

says no. This leads them to discuss God, the relationship people can develop with him and other elements of Christianity.

Rome also meets someone from Yemen who talks to her about his conversion to Christianity and what it cost him. He says he had dreams about Jesus and decided to convert to Christianity. However, once he did, his family tried to kill him. His best friend was then killed as they were both trying to escape and then he got baptized in Ghana. He shows her the scars he has from when his family attacked him and relates the things he has survived to become a Christian. He came to Italy and is now also focusing on learning Italian. Rome notes how lucky she is to be in Italy.

Missionary Work: Finding, Teaching, Serving

As missionaries, these bloggers do a variety of things. Of course, they serve as missionaries who wish to teach and share their religion with the people they encounter in the various countries they go to. They also want to show the people they encounter love and understanding by serving them. One element of missionary work is to contact people on the street and other places in hopes of meeting people to teach. Another element is service, just for the sake of becoming a part of the community they are in and making connections with people.

Tokyo mentions teaching English classes several times. She also mentions working with people in English as they want their English to get better. As discussed earlier, in Japan, people want to speak and learn English. A way for the missionaries to serve that community is to offer “Eikaiwa” which are English Conversation Classes. This helps them to reach out and connect to the community and serve the people they meet.

Rome also talks about speaking Italian and also the ways they help some Italians learn English. One story that she relates is when she meets an Italian man and offers him an English course. He

comments that he will do something for them if they do something for him. The man then takes them in an elevator in this tall building where they can see everything in Rome. Rome writes, “We offer English courses to everyone because it gets us access to cool places and free stuff.” She also encounters experiences of translating for Americans in Italy as well as other tourists from other countries. She notes that even those who speak English are hard for the Italians to understand, depending on the accent used. It is as different as the dialects or diverse languages found in other countries.

Cape Verde discusses some service opportunities he has and how the things he does and helps with is unique to Cape Verde. He writes, “I participated in some very African activities in terms of service, like carrying fetched water to people’s houses, filling up water tanks inside the house with that fetched water and also carrying the things that a member sells... on my head!” He later writes that it was comfortable and fun.

Kenya writes that he performs more service for a family experiencing hardship. They cut down wood so the family could make it into charcoal and sell it. He also notes, “The father is really really sick and in Nairobi, the mother is caring for four kids under six years old, one of which is a newborn and another has a mental disability and needs lots of care. It was a really dismal scene for the family, and I felt really bad that we couldn’t help out more.” Kenya also writes about plowing a “shamba (garden) with oxen.”

Tokyo talks about her work as a missionary and how she approaches Japanese people she is contacting on the street. This is pertinent to a discussion of culture because of the language and approach she discusses or contemplates using. One option for an approach is to be direct and declare herself as a missionary from the LDS church. However, the alternative is, as she writes, “Or do we go for a more sly approach... pretty dress! Where did you buy it? We are from

America!” This is significant because it indicates that the missionaries in Japan have observed how little Japanese people usually care about religion and want to find the most effective way to approach and build a relationship with the people in Japan.

South Africa discusses how as missionaries they do service at a retirement home which allows them to get to know the people. She writes, “We go there a lot. A few times a week at least. The people there love us so much and I love them too! They have just adopted us right into their family.” She continues about her experience in the retirement home by saying, “The whole activity is one of my favorite things I have done on mission so far. The residents have become like my grandmas. They call us their kids and we call them grandmas.” South Africa also recounts her own finding experience while trying to get in touch with a family who had expressed interest in talking with the missionaries. She writes, “It was just a man’s name and for his address it said, ‘Look for a big house with shiny cars on the way to the game reserve.’” She relates that they assumed they would never find the house but then she writes, “There was a HUGE house with a HUGE gate. The garage was open and there were two Bentleys inside. Parked outside were three other super nice, super shiny cars.” They realized this was the right house. The family was no longer interested, but this was just one finding experience for South Africa. As she has been in multiple countries, she tends to focus on the comparisons in her discussions. She writes, “We have been tracting and tracting and tracting with minimal success.... We have met a lot of really friendly people here but nobody is interested! It definitely makes me appreciate Bots a lot more. There, everyone and their dog would let us in. Here, nobody, especially the dogs, will let us teach them.” In a later entry, she touches upon these comparisons about the people again. She notes, “Zambians are so so nice. In Botswana, I felt like

the reason a lot of people were nice to me was just because I was foreign. Which was fine! But here I feel like people are just genuinely nice just for the sake of being nice.”

Rome talks about her experiences while trying to contact or talk to people in the park. One of the first entries includes an experience where she meets someone from Romania who says he has friends who are Mormon and is okay with talking to the missionaries. Rome comments, “We have never had this much success in finding people that will listen, let alone give us a chance to explain more.” Rome also talks about how meeting with people or going to people’s houses works in Italy. She writes, “In Italy every apartment building has a set of doorbells on the outside, so you have to ring the doorbell to get let in. Then sometimes you have to be let in again to get past the gate inside and then again at their door.” Rome further talks about contacting or meeting strangers on the street and observes, “People will tell you anything if you just ask. I’ve met so many incredible people from just talking to them on the street, in the metro, in the train, anywhere really.” Rome also relates another experience about trying to find people with a new missionary. She writes, “We tried street finding and these poor greenies have never stopped a person in their lives. I remember having that same fear in my eyes and Italians smell fear. That didn’t go over well.” Rome also explains the best ways to contact or talk to Italians. She writes, “It is really easy to bond with Italians, you just have to hate all the same things and ask them how to make lasagna.”

In a later entry, Rome talks about helping an older lady she meets on the bus. The lady asks for help getting her shopping cart off of the bus and she ends up helping her up a hill and to the apartment building where she lives. Once they get to the hill, she offers to help her to the apartment countless times and the woman resists. Finally, she agrees, and they take all of her things to the fourth floor apartment. At the end of the story the woman notes that the

missionaries are angels and she had been praying for someone to help her. Rome relates, “I laughed to myself as I remembered all of the times she had denied our help even though she had been praying for that help.”

Rome later talks about going to an African refugee camp and teaching the people there. She comments, “I love teaching Africans.” She also talks about teaching with other Italian members and observes, “It’s always interesting teaching with members, mostly because Italians like to yell at each other and it doesn’t always bring the best spirit.” However, in the next paragraph she writes, “I could never put into words really how much I love Italy, how much I love these people.”

Taiwan mentions English classes and how they teach a few people who are interested in improving their English skills. As a missionary, he also participates in a new method to contact people on the street that involves being very clear about who he is and why he is in Taiwan. He notes, “Lots of people quickly steer clear of us but we know if they don’t run away when they read what our badge says that they probably actually have interest in why we are here.” Taiwan also goes into more detail about the customs or culture behind the behavior of the people in Taiwan and how their reactions connect back to their traditions and how they honor their ancestors. He explains:

So the Asian face. we call it here "bu hao yi si" basically means they are too polite and nice to tell you they don't want anything to do with religion. So you'll be meeting with folks for a month before they finally tell you they like bai bai -ing (worshiping ancestors). Honestly the whole family thing is kind of used as an excuse. They try to make it a big deal so you think they would love the whole forever families doctrine right? nope. They go for the "no other success can compensate for the failure at home". Most people just do it out of tradition. They don't know why, they just do it, and life seems good enough for them. They have food so they are happy (or think they are). Honestly as far as teaching them I just talk to everyone and whoever will listen I keep going. So we may see more rejection, but the people that don't run away, or yell at us in Taiwanese, stick around and are actually good investigators.

This entry shows the reactions of the Taiwanese people and how the missionary has adapted to the actions and behaviors that are customary in Taiwan.

Chapter Four: Discussion and Conclusion

Conclusion

Throughout the course of the narratives from the missionaries, various things emerged. These topics are discussed over the themes that were presented. As a missionary who travels to a foreign country, or a country he or she is unfamiliar with, that missionary will see the country with a unique perspective that stands apart from the perspectives of the average traveler or average expatriate. The missionary sees the country, people and morals through the lens of his morals and religious beliefs. This would be true of any traveler, but because more prominent with a missionary whose sole purpose for being in that foreign country is to share his or her beliefs. As a result, observations made or noticed by the missionary, may not even be a factor or noticed by other expatriates, unless their sense of morality or values were similar to those of the missionary. For missionaries, the expectation is that you are dedicating all of your time and energy to working, but these expectations come from a decidedly western standard of habits and culture norms.

Throughout the text of the missionary blogs, there are certain cultural habits observed or noted, that become issues or hindrances to the conversion and teaching processes of the missionaries. It seems likely that these issues would not be so recurrent, or so prevalent if being observed by others who were not missionaries, or not through the value system of the missionaries. This pattern can be observed specifically through the LDS missionary text in this study. A habit noticed by the LDS missionaries in a majority of the countries, and that was a dominant issue for them as missionaries was the cultural habits or perceptions regarding marriage. As the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints focus on no sexual relationships before marriage, and what is called the Law of Chastity. These morals or standards

were seen to be not prevalent in almost all of the countries included in this study. Throughout the narratives of these LDS missionaries, assumptions and observations were made of the people they encountered based on their own cultural perspective that was limited to not only being Americans in a foreign country but also to being LDS and having the cultural values of their religious beliefs. There was constant and consistent talk of getting investigators married, or to choose to be married before participating in baptism or conversion to the LDS Church. This was observed in almost all of the countries and while definitely being a result of cultural standards in each area, seem also to be reflective of different moral values throughout the world. If someone other than LDS missionaries had been the bloggers, these habits may not have been recorded, or even noticed. However, as the principle of marriage and chastity are important doctrines in the LDS faith, the habits of the people, or lack of marriage was constantly observed and discussed as a problem or issue that needed to be resolved.

Another factor that needs to be addressed regarding the missionaries themselves is that LDS missionaries enter the mission field as early as 18 for men and 19 for women. This means that for the most part, these missionaries are becoming missionaries right after high school and depending on the situation, have not lived away from home, or on their own, or lived on their own in foreign countries before. The elements of maturity and experience would definitely be a factor in how they see the world or make cultural observations and assumptions. This also became clear throughout the entries examined based on the language used. There was a lot of usage of “crazy,” “weird,” and other terms used that can be attributed to the youth and inexperience of the missionaries.

One of the main purposes of this study was to understand how the missionaries would form their own cultural identities once exposed to cultures and people different from their own.

As a missionary, they were in a unique situation to provide a perspective as someone living in a foreign country who also wanted to get to know and understand the people they were meeting in order to talk to them and share their own spiritual beliefs. Some of the missionaries seemed to demonstrate the ability to talk and relate to the people around them more so than others. It is safe to say that the cultural identities assumed by the missionaries while on their missions were framed by their own ideologies and religious values, but were impacted by the new cultures they were introduced to. Some of the missionaries embraced these new cultures and clearly became a part of the new culture. Others, seemed to consistently focus on the “otherness” of the new culture and focus on what was not home, or different about the new country and culture.

As discussed in the study by De Korne, Byram, and Fleming (2007), many times immigrants identify with both cultures and do not choose to “promote” or rank one or the other as more important or higher than the other. In terms of the LDS missionaries in this study, it seemed like the majority of the missionaries became bicultural or appreciated the country they were in and the new culture they were exposed to. Rome uses “we” to refer to Italy being eliminated from the World Cup. She does not designate Italy or Italians with being disappointed, but states that “we were disappointed upon being eliminated.” Further, Sweden notes and realizes how multicultural Sweden actually is, but makes efforts and strides to relate to all of the cultures and religions around him. He repeatedly talks about attending services at the worship centers of various religions and talks about the spiritual beliefs held by the Swedish, but also of the many people he encounters in Sweden who are not only from Sweden. He seems to understand and realize the variety and diversity around him and seeks to understand it by becoming a part of his community. Tokyo talks about wearing a “yukata” which is a traditional Japanese dress to a festival. She celebrates something important to Japan and makes sure to dress

specifically for the occasion. She is not interested in setting herself a part, but in becoming a part of the celebration. Cebu seems to understand the people of the Philippines and relate to them throughout the course of the entries studied. He discusses the people in terms of affection and caring and does not set himself a part or distinguish what has happened to the Philippines as separate from what is happening to him. This is apparent throughout all of his entries but specifically during the entries about the typhoon. South Africa actually travels to multiple countries in Africa and yet attempts to assimilate in every country she is in. She discusses learning not only the languages of the people she is teaching, but other tribal languages. She takes advantage of the opportunity to live with the various African companions she has and tries to learn their dialects and languages to communicate with as many people as she can.

In contrast to these examples, some of the missionaries chose to consistently set themselves from the people and culture that they are in. The study from Pitts (2009) focuses on the habits and experiences of short-term exchange students. He writes about expectations and the “gaps that were created as a result of these expectations.” Even with these failed expectations, he notes that the students came away with a new and expanded sense of identity. Among the missionaries, this seems to happen to some of them. Rio struggles with almost all elements of Brazilian culture that are foreign or different from “home.” She consistently points out the inconveniences, smells, and her narrative tone is generally one of trial and tribulation brought upon her just by being in Brazil. We do not know if this changed much throughout the course of her mission as only six months were analyzed. However, she does mention in one of the last entries that she doesn’t notice the lack of certain conveniences anymore. She finally seems to focus more on the other elements of her mission than just the cultural differences and lack of

amenities she encounters. For most of her entries, however, the gap between expectation and reality is very prominent.

Kenya also seems to struggle with accepting the cultural differences or adjusting to the noticeable differences. He takes the attitude of “only in Kenya” for most of his narrative. This is also found to be true for Argentina. The worlds both of these missionaries inhabit seem to be so foreign to them, this “foreignness” never goes away. For Kenya, even when he seems to have adjusted or become a part of the culture through social and food habits, he still seeks to replicate his feelings at home. He relates more than one experience of eating American food and becoming sick afterwards because his eating habits and diet have changed. However, each time, even though he is sick, he returns to get more of the same thing. He cares more about recreating that feeling or comfort from eating American food than he does about the consequences that follow.

Symbolic Interactionism, which essentially means that we apply meaning to things based on our lives, society, and how we interact with others seems to have become manifest in most of the experiences of the missionaries. The missionaries see and experience things through the lens of their own religious ideologies and beliefs. They relate experiences they have through the lens of young adults who may or may not have had a lot of experience in foreign countries. They also have the vocabulary and language of youth. These missionaries see what they encounter through their own lenses and either glory and revel in these differences which become assimilated and a part of their identities, or reject the culture for its “otherness.” The majority seemed to come away with a changed, or enlarged identity, but there were some who still did not let go of home or the expectations that they had during the six months that I studied.

This study focused on the themes found while analyzing the text of the LDS missionary blogs. This was an important method of distinction because as stated before, “textual analysis can offer creative ways to articulate experiences,” (Phillipov, 2013). The ten categories created helped me to narrow my focus and see what was really important to the missionaries. As Snee (2010) noted in her study, the platform of blogging is both public and private. Snee looks at students on their gap year. They are temporary travelers in foreign countries and attempt to find the right narrative and language to explain what they are experiencing. The LDS missionaries are similar. As established before, the blogs were commonly created and written for the benefit of family and friends at home, but also represent a comprehensive view of their thoughts while in a foreign country. Whether the missionary struggled with elements of adaption or assimilation, or embraced the cultural differences, the ways in which the missionaries portray their experiences helps us to understand how a foreign culture impacted them as individuals. From the entries analyzed, even the missionaries who would still not identify or who did not assimilate well to the foreign culture gradually had a better understanding of that culture. While I do not think the gap between expectations and reality was eliminated for all of the missionaries, their sense of identity was certainly impacted. For the missionaries who consistently referred to themselves and the country they were in as an “us” or a “we,” we can see that their identity was changed and altered and would be expanded with this experience as a missionary. For the others, their expectations may have led to culture shock or disappointment, but even those expectations were lessened and decreased over time.

This study provides a valuable starting point for others who would like to explore how foreigners in foreign countries perceive and identify with their own culture and the cultures around them. It also provides valuable insight into how religious beliefs and ideologies can

impact the lens we use to look at the world and negotiate our own identity, specifically when confronted with cultures, actions, and beliefs that are different from our own.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are a few limitations of this study. One, is that it would be really interesting and even more conclusive to have pulled data from the missionaries for the entire length of their mission. This would have shown not only how culture is observed and discussed, but also if the way culture through the lens of the missionary changed over the course of his or her time in a country. Another limitation was not having multiple missionaries from each country. It is hard to judge a missionary or an experience based only on one person's perspective. I attempted to include a wide variety of countries, but even more would be interesting. Some future research could look at other students or young adults traveling and staying in foreign countries. Specifically, people who travel and attempt to understand and relate to the culture in order to teach people or to build relationships would be interesting. There are always an abundance of travel blogs from tourists and in the literature from this study we see examples of expatriate blogs. However, it would be also to compare and contrast the results of this study and other expatriate blogs with exchange students or other young adults who reside in a foreign country for a specified length of time.

References

- Antunovic, D. and Hardin, M. (2013). Women bloggers: Identity and the conceptualization of sports. *New Media & Society*, 15, 1374-1392. doi: 10.1177/1461444812472323
- Balinski, A, Ed. Missionary Blog Index (LDS). Retrieved from <http://preparetoserve.com/missionary-blog-index/>
- Campbell, H. (2010). Religious authority and the blogosphere. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*.15, 251-276. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.01519.x
- Chen, Y. (2010). Examining the presentation of self in popular blogs: A cultural perspective. *Chinese Journal of Communication*,3, 28-41.
- Cheong, P., Halavais, A., & Kwon, K. (2008). The chronicles of me: Understanding blogging as a religious practice. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 7, 1313. doi: 10.1080/15348420802223015
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Facts and Statistics Newsroom. Retrieved from <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-stats>
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Law of chasity. Retrieved from <http://www.lds.org/chastity>
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Modesty. Retrieved from <http://www.lds.org/modesty> “Word of Wisdom.”
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Word of wisdom. Retrieved from <http://www.lds.org/wordofwisdom>
- De Korne, H., Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (2007). Familiarizing the stranger: Immigrant perceptions of cross-cultural interaction and bicultural identity. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 2, 290-307. doi: 0143-4632/07/04 290-18

- Dumaing, F.P., David, M.K., & Dealwis, C. (2011). Conversion narratives and construction of identity among Christians in Malaysia. *Multilingua*, 30, 319-331. doi: 10.1515/mult.2011.015
- Durovic, J. (2008). Intercultural communication and ethnic identity. *Journal of Intercultural Communications*, 16. Retrieved from: <http://www.immi.ed/intercultural>
- Eckert, S. and Chadha, K. (2013). Muslim bloggers in Germany: An emerging counterpublic. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35, 926-942. doi: 10.1177/0163443713501930
- Faules, D. & Alexander, D. (1978). *Communication and Social Behavior: A symbolic interaction perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Foote, K. (1990). To remember and forget: archives, memory, and culture. *American Archivist*, 53, 378-393. doi: 10.17723/aarc.53.3.5711913357m4n4m0
- Fursich, E. (2009). In defense of textual analysis: Restoring a challenged method for journalism and media studies. *Journalism Studies*, 10, 238-252. doi: 10.1080/14616700802374050
- Hewitt, J. (2000). *Self and Society: A symbolic interactionist social psychology*. Needham, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Holliday, A. (2010). Complexity in cultural identity. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 10, 165-177. doi: 10.1080/14708470903267384
- Ibrahim, Y. (2008). Blogs as the people's archive: The phantom public and virtual presence. *Journal of New Communications Research*, 3, 65-73.
- Jager, S. (2001). Discourse and knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage

- Kang, Y. and Yang, K. (2009). Gay and lesbian blogs in China: Rhetoric of reversed silence in Cyberspace. *China Media Research*, 5, 21-27. Retrieved from <http://www.chinamediaresearch.net>
- Mendoza, S.L., Halualani, R.T. & Drzewiecka, J.A. (2002). Moving the discourse on identities in intercultural communications: Structure, culture, and resignifications. *Communications Quarterly*, 50, 312-327. doi: 10.1080/01463370209385666
- Mol, H. (1979). The identity model of religion: How it compares with nine other theories of religion and how it might apply to Japan. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 6, 11-38. Retrieved from <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/3052>
- Nair-Venugopal, S. (2009). Reframing identities in intercultural communication. *Laanguage & Intercultural Communication*, 9, 76-90. doi: 10.1080/14708470902807685
- Oaks, D. (1993). The great plan of happiness. *Ensign*, 74. Quoted in: *We believe in being chaste*. David A. Bednar. 2013.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The presentation of self in virtual life: Characteristics of personal home pages. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79, 643-661. doi: 10.1177/107769900207900307
- Phillipov, M. (2013). In defense of textual analysis: Resisting methodological hegemony in media and cultural studies. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 30, 209-223. doi: 10.1080/15295036.2011.639380
- Pitts, M. J. (2009). Identity and the role of expectations, stress, and talk in short-term student sojourner adjustment: An application of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33, 450-462. doi: 10/1016/j.ijintrel.2009.07.002

- Snee, H. (2010). Using blog analysis. *ESRC National Centre for Research Methods*. Retrieved from <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities>
- Stout, D. (2012). *Media and religion: Foundations of an emerging field*. New York: Routledge.
- Tang, Q. and Chao, C. (2010). Foreigners' archive: Contemporary China in the blogs of American expatriates. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 3, 384-401. doi: 10.1080/17544750.2010.516574
- Taricani, E. (2007). Communities of blogging: Extensions of our identities. *American Communications Journal*, 9. Retrieved from <http://ac-journal.org/journal/2007>
- Walker, J. (2012). LDS missionary blogs useful if etiquette is observed. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com>

Appendices

Appendix A

MISSION	DATE RANGE	# OF ENTRIES
Cape Verde	January 7, 2014 - July 15, 2014	27
Kenya Nairobi	November 11, 2013- July 21, 2014	37
Argentina Buenos Aires South	June 12, 2013- March 24, 2014	20
Japan Tokyo	February 20, 2013- November 2013	12
Sao Paolo North	December 6, 2013- July 21, 2014	30
Rio Brazil	November 25, 2013- July 23, 2014	16
Stockholm Sweden	October 2013- May 26, 2014	22
Cebu Philippines	May 22, 2013- Dec 2013	22
South Africa	Dec 2013- July 2, 2014	34
Rome Italy	November 2013- June 2014	31
Taiwan	November 2013 - June 2014	12

Appendix B

CAPE VERDE MISSION

DATES FROM JANUARY 7, 2014 TO JULY 14TH 2014

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2014

The first part of the week was hard because literally nobody wanted to talk to us. The parties started early New Year's Eve and then continued nonstop until the 3rd (and people had work on the 2nd!)

MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2014

The same has certainly happened here too except for the fact that today is some national holiday here. It's like the day that they are celebrating liberty (but it's not their Independence Day). Nobody really knows why they don't have school or the banks are closed but they are getting ready for a big old party downtown. Hopefully that doesn't mean that we are going to experience a "New Years" aftermath again.

MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 2014

That family is so nice. They keep trying to feed us food!

Yes, it is hot and humid here practically year round. There are 2 areas where it actually gets cold though, one on Fogo and the other are areas near Mindelo where it gets cool because of winds. There is even a town in Fogo that is so high on the volcano that they get snow during the night but it completely melts away quickly. I never got to see it because missionaries can't go there. Praia is really hot and the only time you actually feel a temperature change is when the sun goes down.

MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2014

One last thing to talk about is soccer on P-days. I think that has become the highlight of my P-days (besides using the Internet). I haven't enjoyed playing soccer this much since I played as a 10 year old. Next week I am going to bring my camera to soccer and take some photos.

This last week, as we were walking down the street, a member from another ward stopped us and told us, "Elders, you have a bunch of people who are ready to hear the Gospel down in "baixo" (the side of town where there are a lot of bars) and start with MaisAlto (a less active). Elder Conduanhe and I took that suggestion, made plans and are right now executing that plan to grow the Church there. Hopefully, we will see a lot of success from down in the "baixo."

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2014

Elder Jarvis and I got sick of rice and so we made pancakes, hash browns, eggs with cheese and ham, and chocolate or strawberry sauce. It was awesome and Thursday has become Breakfast for Lunch day.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2014

So, we have this marriage (they should literally be married this or next week. Pray for this week.) and the husband got Elder Conduanhe and I matching T-shirts for a Cape Verdean soccer team. So today during soccer we wore them and we looked awesome though I can't say that my shirt helped me play better soccer. In reality, I think I played worse, but we looked cool!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2014

At this point, we are working with a lot of people who aren't married but live with their spouses and have no interest in marriage or the Church. That is a big problem that we have run into.

SUNDAY, MARCH 2, 2014

We then got her ready to leave and waited for a taxi to the baptism. Well, because of a local marriage, all the taxis were being used so we waited by the road for 20 minutes for other taxis.

Weather has been pretty nice. People are still wearing sweaters and binis and I am still rocking the short-sleeve white shirts. It has been really sunny which means that my tan is getting really nice too. One day I will have to send a picture of that.

MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2014

The question is what is happening with this transfer. Did I stay or will I be going to a new area? The answer is... well, to be honest, I don't even know. Because of Carnival (a huge holiday here) all the flights and boats are bought out for the week. So Elder Conduanhe and I will work together for one more week and then most likely be split up. It won't be a very easy week though because of all the parties and things that have been and will be going on. Tomorrow, the day of, we aren't allowed to go out and teach so it looks like we will be doing a lot of studying and enjoying some good old Mormon Tabernacle Choir for the whole day. But yeah, that's mission life.

It started with a couple hours of football followed by Elder Jarvis, Elder Amado, Elder Conduanhe and I going on a hike in the other Elder's area through a valley ending at this beautiful beach. It kind of stinks that we aren't allowed to actually get on the beach but the nice thing is that you didn't have to get on the beach to take beautiful pictures.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2014

Achada San Felipe! You don't know where that is? Well, it is just barely in Praia. I am the last area you drive through to leave for interior Santiago.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2014

So, about my new location, Achada São Filipe. To give you a little idea its sort of a weird mixture of Fogo, Achada Grande, and Palamrajo (like the nicest part of Praia). For example, I could walk into one house and be like, "Wow, this place is home!" and others like "Why is this zombie dog trying to eat my ankle?" It's pretty funny. But I like the area and our house is nice. I got to our place and found some hot chocolate packets and a microwave! Oh, what a nice afternoon. But it takes about 30 minutes to walk from one side of my area to the other and it is nearly impossible to find anyone's house with just directions. The ward is nice and big. There are a ton of families and seems like a lot of the people understand what they need to do.

I keep hearing about how bad that whole situation in Ukraine is. It doesn't seem to bother people here.

MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2014

So, the first thing that I want to talk about is the marriage of M and P! This was the first marriage that I have ever witnessed here in Cape Verde and also it was also the first one where it was my investigators who were getting married. It was kind of a small crowd (a couple of drunks and us) with them in the Registro. The lady who lead them through the vows spoke in Creole (that was kind of interesting) and when she asked if anyone objected to the marriage, everyone responded aloud "No!" It was funny. Their daughter was their ring girl and then they kissed and then the party moved to their house where we ate goat, a weird corn/grain mix, beans and rice (a staple food here, yea...remember when my staple was PB&J?), and of course, cake (they didn't have any fancy ole' cake). I took like 100 photos (I was the photographer at the party) but I think I will only include couple of my favorites.

. I received word that she had her son and that his name is James (other names in between) M. and he was born on the same day as my 10 month mark). This is cool because they got the name from the English tabs in my Bible! I'm taking credit for the name :)

P-day today was a little bit different then it has been. Today, we didn't got to play soccer but instead we went to Cidade Velha (or "old city", clever name for the oldest city in West Africa). We did almost everything. We hiked in the mountains, went to a fort, walked on the road next to the beach, and just enjoyed the company of one another.

MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2014

We had the opportunity to go to another wedding this week, for a couple of people I had taught in Achada Grande. Their names are Z and L. The missionaries before Elder Conduanhe and I started the marriage process with them and the missionaries after us got to enjoy the wedding planning. They had a "party" after the wedding, which was the closest thing to a family wedding reception that I will probably be getting here. They had cake, little desserts, a lunch of rice, beans, and other Cape Verdean staples and they went on a honeymoon. It is actually because they went on a honeymoon that they weren't there to enjoy the party. They went to the Canary Islands and will return later this week so that they can be baptized!

It's getting hot here and I think it might just be the fact that we are closer to the Equator. I am sort of missing rain and snow right

In the photo, this is me with my baked spaghetti, sausage, egg, veggie, and soon to be topped with ketchup and mayo. It's actually pretty good, but there's a ton of oil in it. And yes, I made it alone.

MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2014

They broadcast it live online and they have people translating it live too so we here in Africa were listening to it in Portuguese,

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2014

Thursday was the day of the wedding of E and S! They were an hour and an half late but it was still a beautiful wedding and the cake was awesome. They had a "party" in their house and it was just funny to see S in her wedding dress serving fish and chicken.

TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2014

The area that I am working in (but don't live in; it is a 30 minute walk) is called Bela Vista, or in English "Beautiful View." It's not the prettiest area itself but with the view you can see all of Praia.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2014

, we ran to the lighthouse in Praia and took some awesome photos. We hung out there for a little bit

then the day continued with teaching some sweet lessons and then ending with a night at King Burger (like the only place to get something that is similar to a hamburger) where we got some cake and shawarma. It was a memorable Cape Verdean birthday!

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2014

On May 1st it was the Cape Verdean version of Labor Day, called "Dia dos Trabalhadores." Basically, on that day, everyone goes to work but doesn't have to work, but rather have a huge party so even fewer people were at home that day but it was still a good day.

MONDAY, MAY 19, 2014

He is a nice guy and a really good hip hop dancer. I need to take a video of him one of these days dancing because it is pretty cool.

THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2014

So, on the topic of interesting... African food,, that once picky young version of Elder Dorff would never eat, this week Elder Godfrey and I made eel. We floured it and then fried it. It was good but so many bones. We were talking to a member afterwards and he told us that we got the wrong type of eel, so he is going to fish up a different type to have us cook. Looks like we could be eating it again this week.

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 2014

the way she had explained where she lived was super unclear. We were walking around, asking everyone if they knew her and at some point we were just kind of annoyed that we couldn't find her. We had already asked if she could meet us at a nearby store but she said that her daughter was sleeping and couldn't leave the house. Eventually we were talking to one another trying to figure out if we should continue our search or if we should just go to our marked appointment but for whatever reason, we decided to keep searching until we found her house (we were helped by one of our other investigators).

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2014

Landlords are tough... mostly because they sign contracts then bring up problems with the contract. It just takes a lot of time to worry about everything. Looks like I am gaining lots of

experience with rental contracts. We have a landlord coming in tomorrow to the office to fight with (notice I didn't say "talk to") President Oliveira, Ivandro and I. It should be fun.

Also this week I participated in some very African activities in terms of service, like carrying fetched water to people's houses, filling up water tanks inside the house with that fetched water, and also carrying the things that a member sells... on my head! It is easier, and more comfortable, then it looks. It was fun.

SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 2014

This last week was interesting in Bela Vista, mostly because there were so many parties. You would think that because Cape Verde was disqualified from the World Cup (they had a player with a red card play) that they wouldn't be as into watching it. Oh forget that. Everyone, their Praia dog, and their goat are watching the games! And with a game starting every 3 hours, it is making it a little harder to teach (imagine it is the same in other countries). Everyone seems to be a fan of Brazil or Portugal or Argentina or Italy or they are part of the "Team Africa must win" movement. I catch a little bit of the action as I pass from house to house. To add the craziness, everyone is having parties where some people are getting a little hammered. That was basically my teaching experience for the week.

Our church is a solid 20 minute walk away from our area, which wouldn't be a big problem except that in Bela Vista, water only enters the town on Sunday morning. That means, everyone is fetching water, washing clothes/dishes, cleaning their houses, taking showers, and storing water for the next week, all right before Church.

The members here make a huge sacrifice every week, as they go to other towns for water on other days, or leave to pick up water at like 4:30 Sunday morning, so they don't have to miss a minute of church at 9.

MONDAY, JUNE 23, 2014

It took the fact that the kids here in Cape Verde are out of school to realize that everyone at home is also out of school!

So, the World Cup is crazy here. Thus far, my 2 teams (Germany and the Netherlands) have done pretty good. The Portuguese Elder in my house didn't want to talk to me the night when Portugal lost to Germany. Almost everyone is watching every game which means that a lot of times we are interrupting people's viewing time. I'm just glad that not all our investigators are soccer fans.

SATURDAY, JULY 5, 2014

I had a lot of memorable conversations and also, I got some new stuff from the give away pile (like a Portugal soccer jersey which I wore to soccer today).

July 7th 2014

So, it sounds like a lot of you people have been really into the FIFA world these past few weeks. I am sure that they have been watched just as much there as they have been here. I am excited because the 2 teams that I have been supporting (or at least telling everyone that I want them to win) are still in. Hopefully, it will be Germany and the Netherlands in the end! But, usually, we

don't really notice that the games are going on because our investigators right now, for the most part, don't like watching soccer. I guess that is an unique blessing that we have right now.

Palmarejo has been good. Because of the size of the area, we are always finding new people to talk to, while in the meantime getting lost. We are getting to know the members and through them we are finding many families who are progressing well.

Moving people around although in the Spirit of the 4th of July, Elder Godfrey and I decided to get some ground beef and make hamburgers and make our own French Fries. So although it wasn't as good as a BBQ one at home, it was still a good change from the rice, chicken, spaghetti, egg, and whatever else we eat. We are going to have to do it again!

July 14th 2014

First off, I would like to congratulate the Germans for their nice victory yesterday against Argentina. I didn't end up seeing anything of the game but I knew they had won when a member came out crying, "Why Messi!? What went wrong!?" So yeah, I am personally happy that the World Cup has ended because that will mean more people will be at home and more people will want to talk to us. Sadly, the World Cup wasn't the only activity that was demanding the attention of the Cape Verdeans. There was also a 2 day Funana Music Festival on Gamboa Beach (the one where all the big parties are here in Praia). Nobody was home because of that. For those who are wondering what Funana is, just wait till I get home and I will play you some, because I have plans to listen to it in my car at home (Get ready for those rides to and from Utah and California!)

KENYA NAIROBI MISSION

Monday, November 11, 2013

... people have been busy lately with the rainy season coming so most people are busy preparing their shambas (fields) for the rain. So we will also be helping a lot of people this week with service, helping to cultivate and plow the fields hahah so it will be interesting for sure. Also another weird thing as of late, i don't know what it is but i seem to be seeing more and more naked kids walking around.... and its not like they don't have clothes... they are just naked..... i don't know but it sure is interesting. The kids here have no shame!!! GO KENYA!

Today i got to go to the Tsavo National Park. It was sooo awesome!! We went with the senior missionaries and they drove us around the park, and i finally got to see Elephants, ostriches, and hippos!! it was cool seeing the animals in their natural habitats. They are wayyyy bigger than you would expect them to be... especially the elephants. They just move all over the place breaking trees left and right!! hah but its cool. I LOVE GODS CREATIONS ESPECIALLY IN KENYA!! But yeah it was super fun.

November 18, 2013

We helped a family fetch water on our bikes which was actually pretty fun, and we also helped another family basically a cut up tree to their home so that they could make charcoal to sell. Both families had big trials and problems that they were going through, so it was great to help them. Especially the family that we moved wood for. The father is really really sick and in Nairobi, the mother is caring for 4 kids under 6 yrs old, one of which is a new born and another

has a mental disability and needs lots of care. It was a really dismal scene for the family, and i felt really bad that we couldn't help out more.

Monday, November 25, 2013

So not much time this week to write because the power has been really bad because of the rain and stuff!

First off me and elder Tebbs got invited to a village meeting... hahahha it was pretty interesting. At first we went to the branch presidents home to go on splits with some of the priests in the branch.... but non of them showed up. So while we were there were a lot of old people there and it was kind of weird.... but then they called us over to sit down and join them, so we were like ha ok sure. Turned out they were having a village meeting and they wanted us to be apart of it! ha we didn't really do much because it was all in Kikamba so me and elder tebbs were just sitting their, but we did enjoy some tasty goat meat! ha they cooked everything in a huge pot, and they told us to eat as much as we could, and to also drink the juice from the stew.... lets just say it tasted very interesting.... but non the less we ate!!!!

So we have to fill it up with a hose from outside because the facet inside doesn't work, so we had to start doing it like 5 hours before the service to make sure the font was filled enough. But after some time i noticed that the water turned off... so i was like ohh no the water tanks are empty! and they just about were.... so we had to rush around and turn off all the water pipes and stuff to try to conserve enough water to get the water in the font.

Also got to go on exchanges this week to Nthongoni again to be with elder Turner, so that as fun. Lots of big crazy bugs in their area and flat hahaha it was cool though. Also got to plow a shamba (garden) with oxen, so that was fun to.

December 2, 2013

Its crazy becuase she is not even a Mkamba (the main tribe here), but is actually a Kisii (from Western Kenya)! So its nice because she hasnt heard any rumors or anything bad about the church, so she is really interested.

It was funny because I asked her how she liked church yesterday, and she said 'it was good this time'. So i was like what do you mean this time?? And she said, 'oh well today there was actually English being spoken instead of Kikamba, so actually understood some of it'..... hahahahhah i was like join the club! but yeah things are lookin good with here, we hope to teach her again this week.

Also this week a little miracle happened on Sunday! So the entire day i had a flat tire on my wonderful Chinese made one speed bike, so i wasnt able to get it fixed because it was sunday. So i was just doing my best to get around on it, and it got me through most of the day. Finally it got time to head back home for the day, and at the time it was POURING rain. So we were probably still 25 mins away on bike from home when my bike went in self destruct mode. ha just kidding but my tire did rip in half haha so i was like what am i going to do now. So i went under a tree to try to fix it (while it is still pouring), when all the sudden the first councelor in one of our branches pulls up on his piki piki (motorbike). He asked if we needed help and i was like yes please!! ha so he was able to carry me and my bike back to our flat! it was super great because i would have had to basically carry my bike for 20 mins in the pouring rain, but instead we got back super quick! It was a real blessing and miracle though!!

Also this week i ran over a Black Momba on my bike... it was pretty scary haah i thought it was going to bite me!

December 9, 2013

We also did a lot of service, mostly working in the shambas doing some weeding and plowing.

Also this week i got to kill my first chicken! ya it was pretty interesting, and it tasted pretty good. We just got together as a zone and had like a bbq kind of thing. it was nice! But killing a chicken is pretty weird... and they do run around after you kill them.

Sunday, December 22, 2013

So after that i took a 5 hour bus ride from Chyulu to Nairobi. Then we got to stay a day in Nairobi, and then took a 7 hour bus ride to Kitale, and then a 2 hour ride to Mautuma! Ya so Mautuma is awesome. Its very green, jungle-tastic, and rainy. Its another really bushy place but its cool.

so in the middle of the church is like a little court yard thing. so we were waiting for the sunday school class to end in the sacrament meeting room, when we see this little kid come waltzin out of the room. He takes one step out of the room, pulls down his trousers and starts peeing all over the courtyard. It was very interesting for sure. i was kind of in shock at first... but then again i have seen that so much here now it wasn't really that big of a deal. It was super funny though and the kid just walked back into the church like nothing happened hahh. but the kid had no shame. Another cool thing about Mautuma is that they speak a lot of Swahili, so that is really nice so i will be able to learn it faster now! But I am really excited to be in Mautuma now and it seems like a sweet area.

December 23, 2013

So i am still adjusting to things here in Mautuma. Like for one thing the weather. To be honest i don't like it that much... its cold... hahah. Darajani was really hot and sunny so it reminded me of home, but Mautuma is like pretty high altitude and cold and i don't know what else. But other than that i love the area! haha. This area actually reminds me a little bit about Pindale... a little bit.

People love to stack food for us its pretty nice. and yes mom the Food is safe, good, and i have not got sick yet.

December 30, 2013

So this week was really a lot of fun. Right after DDM on Tuesday, our entire zone got on a Kangaroo (taxi car thing) and took off to Eldoret to spend Christmas day there. We went there because here in our zone we don't have couple missionaries... and the closest ones are in Eldoret, about 1 1/2 hours away. But it was awesome! We were able to have a Christmas Eve battle royal.... Kitale Zone vs. Eldoret Zone in a friendly game of soccer.... and lets just say that our zone DOMINATED. Ha but it was a lot of fun. After that we went out to a really nice pizza place (and yes it actually was really nice) and got pizzas. I wanted to get Chinese food as a part of our Thomas family tradition, but Chinese cuisine is not so big in Africa haha. So that was a lot of fun, and even at the end as we were about to leave, the owner of the Restaurant, who was a Muslim, came up to us and was like hey can you guys sing the Christmas song for us?? so all of us Elders started singing we wish you a merry Christmas in the Restaurant!! it was pretty funny, but the owner was really nice and then brought us out a free Christmas cake and then asked us if we could say a prayer. It was really cool, and i liked how the guy really respected our religion. Then Christmas day was really cool, we had a awesome Lunch at the Couples home, the Andersons. They made it really nice and the food was awesome. Tasted like American food!!

January 6, 2013

So we spent the whole day biking around and taking matatus to get around. Legitimately. And also a huge storm rolled on in on us and we got dumped on.... hahah it wasn't very pleasant but hey it definitely spiced things up. It was a really tiresome day.

Also spent new years day in Misiku... just felt like a normal day. The number of drunk people was the same... one out of 5 hahah. But ya its 2014 yall!!

Another funny thing was something a member said in his prayer. People here for the most part are pretty devout and in to their prayers, but sometimes they say some really funny things. So we asked a member to pray for us during our visit with him as we were about to leave, and he said in his prayer "next time we meet let us say to each other 'HEY LORD' we thank you for the gospel".... umm and my companion pretty much lost it and started laughing a little bit. yeah i wont lie it was pretty funny hahaha. The funny stuff that happens in KENYA!

Monday, January 13, 2014

So a month ago they had a member die in their branch, and still hadn't had any sort of funeral service.

So they finally put together a "memorial service", the day before while I was in Kitale and guess what... They assigned me and elder Maduna to give 30 minute talks! The night before.

So the next day we show up to the church 5 minutes before it starts and no one is there. So we waited for a little bit... then 30 minutes go by and the branch president shows up. We asked him if we were still having the service, and he just said ya its just running a little bit behind. So we waited another hour... And only 4 other people showed up. Long story short we prepared 30 minute talks for nothing. The guy never showed up to the church with the body and we wasted almost the entire day. I was pretty upset. But it was good though because i got to study about the atonement. So it kind of worked out in the end but not really

Also this week we had no bikes! On Wednesday half way through the day, my front tire completely ripped and exploded. Legitimately. And because there are no spare bike parts any where close to hear, we have to wait another week or 2 to get a new tire. So we walked kabisa. It was funny because we had to walk 1 1/2 hours up the hill in our area, so while we were walking, a tractor came by with a trailer on the back.... so what did we do?? we flagged it down and got a ride up the hill in it! haha it was really nice and we got up to the top of the hill in only 25 minutes! it was really nice. Then we contacted all of the guys with a Law of Chastity pamphlet... score one for the missionaries!

Tuesday, January 21, 2014

But first we got transfer news! and I'm staying in Mautuma with Elder Griffiths again! Which is good. It kind of stinks though because there is some problems in the government with missionaries getting visas so next transfer we might be down to 60 missionaries in the mission... so please pray that things will change!

Jan 27 at 5:20 AM

So sorry i don't have a lot of time to write, power has gone out 4 times today and its not so reliable at the moment so ya!

It was kind of funny though, because while i was with him we went out tracking, and we pulled up to this super old mamas house. She knew zero English, so i just had Evans translate for me. So he started talking to her for a while just getting to know her. So after a minute or so of talking he turns to me, dead strait face, and says "hey guys what? this is my moms sister...." i was like "umm your aunt?" he was like "yeah i guess so..." ohhh my goodness he didn't even know his own aunt and she didn't know him!!! hahah it was funny and weird and cool at the same time i guess. She also had a Britney Spears poster in her house so that was cool, really spiced up the atmosphere of the home!

Also this week we got to do service for a less active member, and got to cultivate and dig in her shamba. It was cool to work for them because they had been going through some serious

problems for a while, like the mom fractured her leg and doesn't have sufficient money to get it properly fixed, so they were really grateful for us coming to visit them and help them out. It was a really cool experience.

Monday, February 3, 2014

Members are awesome when it comes to teaching, especially in Kenya for a few reasons. One is obviously language. I'm still really working on my Kiswahili, but only know a little bit, just enough to get by on the streets. But members really help with teaching and clarifying in both kiswahili and luya.

So towards the end of the lesson we asked Brother Songa how being baptized in the church has blessed his life, and he was able to share his conversion story with us. He used to be a high priest in his former church, AIC (african inland church), which is a really big status in that church. But he shared that as he learned from the missionaries and especially read the Book Of Mormon, He came to see that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latte Day Saints was God's true church. So he knew that leaving his church was the right thing to do, and to be baptized as a member of our church was what God wanted and needed him to do, and even though many trials and difficulties followed him after that, he has never regretted his decision.

In other interesting news, we had a little 3 year old girl pee in the middle of the church courtyard in between classes.... ya i was in disbelief. At first i thought she was just squatting doing wall sits or something, but upon closer inspection nope.... nope she was peeing. Just on the ground no big.

Also we had a member in testimony meeting share more of a story about how he saw some kid get beat up by the police, wasn't sure where the gospel connection tied into the story but he did get very animated and even came part way into the congregation while bearing his testimony/ telling the story. I was trying not to laugh but it w3as pretty funny hahahah. But hey another interesting and spiritual Sunday in MAUTUMA!!

Also i got to go to mount Elgon National park this week! It was awesome!!

Monday, February 10, 2014

So he obviously had some concerns about it, especially with coffee and tea. Those are really the two biggest things that i have seen people struggle with taking here. Its just about common for everyone to take either coffee or tea every day.

But for my year mark we went out to a real legit PIZZA place! Oh my goodness it was so nice! Only problem was i haven't had that much cheese in a long time so i was a little sick afterwards.... hahah but it was way worth it!! Also me and Elder Griffiths got some way awesome suit coats for the snaggin deal of 500 shillings for 2 suit coats!! haha 6 dollars for suit coats yeahhh we know how to bargain! Lets just say that baby blue looks good on me.... hahahh!!

Sunday, February 23, 2014

Another interesting lesson with Titus this week... CHASTITY! ya that lesson is always interesting haha. But it was really cool and he said that it was a good commandment because people are to dirty these days... ya you tell them Titus!

Sunday, March 2, 2014

It is super difficult to teach families in Kenya. A lot of the time the Husband and wife live in different places, like one lives in Nairobi for work while the other stays at their home area. But now we have a family to teach! The husband is Hudson, and his two sons Brandon and Dixon came to church which was awesome. Unfortunate the wife didn't come. That's another common

problem. Its like a cultural thing where someone always has to stay at the house... so they alternate coming to church. Which really isn't that good... but at least we have something to work with!

Also we saw a really crazy ADC (African divine church) rally/church meeting/ mosh pit/ march thing. ahahahh i don't even know how to really describe it. All i know is that some of the churches out here in Kenya are super crazy. Like the people had drums, flags, batons, and all sorts of other crazy stuff. They were marching down the road singing crazy songs beating the drums and going crazy! Me and my companion were really scared! they weren't going to do anything to us (we think) but it was pretty crazy! People on the side of the road were just jumping in and joining in on the fun! hahah ohhhhhh kenya.

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Even the entire week was pretty crazy and just interesting. Has to be one of the strangest weeks probably of my mission... and also life. I think people were taking crazy pills around here. But none the less we got a ton of work done!

March 10, 2014

I really loved the members of Mautuma!!!! Such awesome people who really love the Gospel and also loved helping us missionaries. But I'm happy I'm still in the same zone as Mautuma, i hope to go on exchanges there sometime in the future.

Wednesday, March 19, 2014

But this week the rains came... and didn't want to leave! But we had to cancel a lot of our appointments this week, just because of the rain. When it rains here its almost impossible to do work. The roads turn into strait mud and its impossible to get around. And even if it looks like its going to rain people will cancel the appointment on us because its too difficult to get around in the rain (we set most of our appointments at the church). But its ok because rain is a blessing! At the church is a church shamba (farm/garden), for all of the members to use to grow things. So he went to work in his shamba.... at the church.... on Sunday... not even coming inside to take the sacrament or to go to the classes. We asked him what he was doing and he was just like super confounded haha. elder maduna said "Now God is going to curse your shamba for sure!" i was like ohhh snap... haha but its true. If we are not obedient, we can receive no blessings. It was both funny and sad at the same time. But afterwards i felt really bad, just that he was working on the sabbath, at the Lords shamba, not even coming to church. Weird experience. Sometimes i don't understand people.

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

On Friday we were in the Kitale market visiting some less active members at their veggie stands. So we were just visiting, when we hear this guy making this big fuss off to the side. At first i just thought it was just some drunk or crazy guy, because its such a common thing. But then we looked over and this guy selling some other things was trying to get our attention, so we started to walk over to him to see what was up, and as we got closer, we saw a Book of Mormon in his hands!

He was told by his employer that our church could help him overcome some of his difficulties. Which is true, we have the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it will fix anything! Except for his concern... I'm not sure what could fix this. He said that his problem was that while he was living in Uganda, a witch came to his family and bewitched all of them so he was wondering if our church could pray for him and un-bewitch him..... ummmm yeah. I had no idea what to say to him. Ha wow! But don't worry this is a very common thing here in Kenya! People no joke believe this stuff. Its crazy!

Monday, March 31, 2014

Another interesting week in Kitale, full of wonderful and weird things. Some guy called me a devil this week, many times actually. It was quite interesting, but hey i just brushed off my shoulders! Also, our Ugandan investigators told us that if they came to church and took the sacrament, then their first born child would just die. Spontaneously com-bust. There are some very interesting beliefs that people in Kenya have about our church, and its sad to see. And what makes it worst is that most of the rumors come from pastors of other churches... they don't like it when their members start coming to our church, mostly because those members aren't paying them anymore.

Monday, April 7, 2014

i love Nairobi. We were able to go to Java House, which is like one of the nicest cafes in Nairobi, and Kenya. Got a MILKSHAKE!!! wow first time in 24 months!!!! it was nice to say the least.

Its weird because a lot of the time random people show up to church, which is awesome, but then they just go missing because there is no way to get a hold of them because most of them don't have phones. But its ok. Just gotta work with what you got!

Monday, April 14, 2014

Also, some drunk guy came up to me and put up the dukes and was ready to fight me! I was like hmm, i dont have time for this, so i just walked away, but that guy wanted to tussle! And then some other people legitimately ran away from us as we tried to talk to them ha.

Its difficult for a lot of the less active members here because the church is so far away from them, more than a 45 minute walk for most. Its weird because the church is in a weird spot in Kitale, not even in town but outside of town so its far for most people. Its really crazy how many trials that members here have. With distance and lack of resources and also persecution from others, its amazing that members here still come to church.

Monday, May 5, 2014

To be honest i almost forgot it was Easter. Didn't see the Easter bunny unfortunately. No fun festivities, but i felt like people were more hyped up for Palm Friday and Good Friday than Easter Sunday. Especially Palm Friday. Saw a ton of people out in the street mobbin around with palm leaves doing some goofy things with them and chanting and i don't know what else. Pretty interesting tho.

April 28, 2014

He is a brand new missionary from Nairobi. It was fun being with him, he had soo much energy and was always super enthusiastic and energetic! Almost like a Kenyan Spencer haha.

Story of the week. Crazy story. So my comp and i found a less active family that no one wanted us to visit apparently... they are awesome but anyways back to the story. The whole family is members, except for the sister to the Father of the family, she goes to ADC (African divine church, ya its bogus). anywho we start the lesson with a prayer, my comp starts praying. As he is prayin i start to hear a really weird noise, but think nothing of it. Then it gets louder and louder, so i open my eyes to see whats goin on around here. The lady who is not a member was making all sorts of funny sounds, and then she just went for it! She started screamin stuff like "oh Jehovah, Lord, Bwana!" like she was at the top of her voice screaming all these crazy things. Me and my comp just start looking at each other like what the freak is going on here?? I was no joke really scared haha. And this lasted for a solid 10 seconds of screaming. After she is done, the member we were with turns to us and says "continue." Elder Dick was just like "in the name of Jesus Christ amen." Then i looked at the lady again and she was shaking and still muttering

stuff to herself. I was in shock, disbelief, and super scared! Nobody else seemed phased by it at all. It was like normal for everyone else! I guess what happened is that she was feeling "the spirit" and then had "the gift of tongues" and just went for it. All it showed me is that apostasy is still rampant today. That is not something that should ever happen, like at all! Super crazy, churches in Kenya teach their members really apostate and dumb stuff. But ya. Grateful that we have restored truths that govern our church and lead us in the strait and narrow way. Look out for apostasy its out there!

Monday, May 5, 2014

Rough week in Kitale though. Lots of bounced appointments and just lost a lot of our investigators. We have really been trying hard to contact and call them, but its either they have their phones off or they just don't answer. We are just really worried that many of them have heard bogus rumors about the church, so they got scared off. Its a big challenge for a lot of people here.

Also did some more street contacting this week. One funny thing. I started talking to this one lady about the church, and her little 7 yr old kid was just standing there, just minding his own business, acting all innocent. But he wasn't! Let me tell you why. As i was talking to his mom (as we are in the middle of the street), all the sudden, he just drops his pants and starts peeing in the middle of the street. No shame whatsoever. Just went for it. Lets just say i got hit by some debris and shrapnel. Its pretty normal to see actually, but not in the middle of town.

Monday, May 12, 2014

People were just bouncing us, not showing up to appointments, and also the rain was a big problem. It gets to muddy for people to travel around, so that contributed to a lot of the problems as well.

Tuesday, June 3, 2014

hahaha crazy how many less active members are in Kenya, even Africa. Out of all the members in the Africa Southeast area, only 36% percent are active.

May 26, 2014

This week we had a mission tour with Elder Carl B. Cook of the seventy. So on Tuesday we went up to Eldoret. We got to play soccer that day and once again Kitale zone dominated Kisumu and Eldoret zone. So we spent the night in Eldoret, and none of us had mosquito nets so we all got destroyed by mosquitoes. Probably the worst night of sleep ever.

The entire time i was sick. And i didn't get sick from any bugs or nothing like that, but it was because all of us missionaries wanted to "treat" ourselves to some good food. So we got PIZZA! oh my goodness. it had to much flavor and cheese. It destroyed my stomach. hahahaha I'm going back to food with no flavor.

Tuesday, June 3, 2014

After that we got invited to go to a homecoming party for a guy returning from a mission in Ghana. It was really cool. Didn't understand a thing because it was all in Kibukusu, but it was nice ha! They treated us like kings because we were missionaries, and they gave us a ton of food! Chapatis, rice, chicken, ndengu, and all sorts of good stuff.

The service was great, but it was also just a really Kenyan baptism, and I will tell you why. First! the opening hymn was 201, Joy to the World. Ya i guess its cool, but then again its only June and Christmas is still 7 months out. But a good song for a bapt i guess . Then! We have to fill up the bapt font (iron box) by hand by getting water out of the well which is like 40 feet deep. So our branch pres did not fill it up all the way.... so in order to baptize Emmanuel (tall 18 yr old guy), he had to kneel down in the font and get baptized like that! The

priesthood was there so its all good and it was done in the correct way. Then we had to tip over the font and it was like 800 pounds, and almost killed someone in the process. Took ten guys to tip it haha.

After church, we were walking around the market going to an appointment. So as we are passing by, all the sudden something catches my eye in a shop. It was the sister we gave a blessing to! She was buying some food! ha i was like well... i don't know what to do at this point. Its a very common thing for people to buy stuff on the sabbath.

June 9, 2014

He said "ya there are a few people i want us to go see, it ONLY takes 1 hour to get there." So we thought well ya that's kind of far, but hey if its where he wants us to go to help someone out so be it! Unfortunately, me and elder Dick forgot where we were.... in Africa more importantly Kenya! So if someone tells you an amount of time, you need to multiply it by about 5 and then you have the real answer haha! Lets just say we ended up biking 40 MILES that day.

! Also while we were biking, some crazy guy started chasing after us full speed like foaming at the mouth. I'm not sure what he was going to do if he caught up to us, but hey nothing bad happened so I'm pretty sure its ok.

Monday, June 16, 2014

Also I learned how bad Kenyan Hospitals are. 1). 4 people to one hospital bed. 2). the doctors here do not know how to find a vein. They just poke randomly. 3). Smells like old people.

As he read thru, he noticed it said not to take tea. At first he said that he was really taken back and even kind of offended, but then he read and saw that this was a revelation from God to the prophet Joseph Smith. Once he saw that he said he knew it was true!

PS this week i was talking to some members, trying to use what little swahili i know, and i tried to say 'This boy wants to be a doctor' and they all started laughing. I was like what is going on?? Then they told me i said 'he wants to be a witchdoctor' ... they all thought it was funny but i didn't!! hahahaaha.

June 23, 2014

A lot of them said wow elder Thomas, you look a lot healthier and bigger now, Kitale must be treating you good! hahah ya something like that. Its just that i don't have to bike 15 kms up hill to get to DDM's anymore haha. Although, we did get fed by just about every person that we went to see. They were like ohhh Elder Thomas is back! Lets make him food! there was Ugali, Skuma wiki, potato stew, chapati, cocoa, mandazi, eggs, ground nuts, and other Kenyan goodies!

Monday, June 30, 2014

On Tuesday we drove from Kitale to Eldoret, and had some extra time so we all got to play soccer together. I have to say soccer has become one of my favorite sports now.

Wednesday, July 9, 2014

Almost all the people we saw while I was with him only spoke Swahili, so he was able to do a lot of teaching.

One thing i have really seen though is that Kenyans are way more bold and open about religion, so they don't fear at all about talking about it. but it was a great experience.

Monday, July 14, 2014

The only way we can communicate is by writing things down on paper and just going back and forth like that. He also taught me how to do a few signs in Kenyan Sign language, just greetings, saying thank you, and also saying we are going. It was pretty cool tho, he was a super cool guy. I was with one of the members named David Kigalu from the branch, and he was just kind

of like umm what is going on around here... he seemed kind of uncomfortable. But we both laughed about it after. It was just really weird because the entire time we didn't say a thing. But man, in Naitiri persecution against the church is really bad. It used to be so bad that when missionaries there would try to buy stuff from shops, people would not give them anything, because they thought that the money would be cursed.... haha ya. Things people believe. But now its not as bad, but there were a good number of people who totally blew us off.

Monday, July 21, 2014

Another interesting week full of the spirit, surprises, and really weird things. But hey that's Kenya for you.

- 1) Got offered some drug by this guy on the street. He was snorting it and it was all over his nose and mouth. I declined. But he was up in the clouds for sure.
- 2) Got punched in the arm by a passing crazy man. I didn't take offense to it, because the week before the same 6'4" crazy man headbutted elder Dick. So i was lucky!
- 3) During street boarding, 10 drunk guys came up and started helping us contact people. ya it was interesting.
- 4) Saw 2 little kids during the week squat in the middle of a main path and well... do their business. Looks like corn has been the meal of choice lately.

ARGENTINA

Monday, October 7, 2013

I guess I would just like to tell everyone that Argentina is pretty ghetto. Well not ghetto, more like 2nd world. I walk in dirt roads everyday! Its pretty great!

President Thurgood said this is one of the most dangerous missions in Argentina. Well, missionaries get robbed a lot anyway. They get guns and knives pointed at them. He said they are kinda like mosquitos.

So far I have eaten a lot of chicken and rice. I have had cow tounge already though. It's actually not that bad. Tastes like a certain meat, but I can't remember what it is. There are a lot of stray dogs in the street. They don't bug people though so it's all good. Really ugly dogs though. The prettiest one I have seen was a mix breed between a rotweiller and a weiner dog. They are so cute! They look like little puppies! ¡Que Linda!

His Dad is Argentine and so he has a pretty good relationship here with Argentinos. He's kinda got that attitude of an Argentine thinking that he knows everything and if your opinion is different than his, you are an idiot.

Monday, October 21, 2013

The food here is pretty darn good. My favorite things are either Alfajores or empanads con jamón y queso. We eat a lot of pasta here. I don't understand how people here are so skinny when they eat tons of carbs and then take a nap right after.

Monday, October 28, 2013

Villa Gesell is pretty cold most of the time. It's pretty humid, but not like Hawaii humid. But with the humidity, it goes right through your clothes so it gets cold a little.

The crazy thing is that even though I am in a different country with a different language and all these crazy things happening to our apartment, I am still super happy!

Getting investigators here is really weird. The seriously just come up out of the ground sometimes. Knocking on doors and contacting in the street is really inefficient.

So about the youth. The youth here are the greatest ever! They are examples to their families like none other.

Monday, November 4, 2013

It says in the Missionary Handbook that holidays and Sundays are the best days for tracting because that is when families are home. In Argentina, it's the days of fútbol and drinking. So Sundays and holidays, not so great here.

Monday, November 11, 2013

Monday, November 18, 2013

We didn't get to talk to any of our investigators this week. We tried setting up an appointment with them, and they say just come by whenever, so we do and they say they are busy. Maybe we just need to teach them right then and there.

Monday, November 25, 2013

Im gonna start with a really gross thing I saw this week. So you guys know that Argentina has stray dogs running all around and its like an every day thing. So Elder Rivero and I were walking around trying to find people and I just see in the corner of my eye and I see a dog of course. And the dog was eating something, still seemed normal to me. But as I got closer, the dog was eating a cat! A cat!! That poor cat. Didn't see it coming...well maybe it did. But that is just a little weird thing about Argentina.

Monday, December 2, 2013

Oh, the Law of Chasity doesn't really exist in Argentina. People who are members, just kinda forget about it. Kinda lame.

As for Thanksgiving, I see letters from people and what they did, like have 4 thanksgiving dinners. I just worked, it really just felt like a normal day in Argentina. I can't even remember what I had for Thanksgiving. Probably noodles.

Monday, December 9, 2013

We have been trying to get a lesson with Gabriel for about a month. He has always been putting it off, until last week. We gave him the Restoration pamphlet to read and ponder about, turns out he didn't read it. But! His wife did, or we think they are married, (people usually aren't married in Argentina.)

Monday, December 16, 2013

It's really hot here in Argentina. Like 90 degrees with 100% humidity. We have the fan going like 24/7. Reminds me of when Keli and Megan lived on the Point. That's how hot it is.

Also, Elder Rivero and I were walking to a potentials house and as we were walking, we saw 3 police pick-up trucks with people on the back with shotguns and masks over their face. About 30 minutes later, we heard gun shots. We just looked over their and were like, "Yeah...let's not walk over their."

You know you are in Argentina when you are having a lesson with someone and they just start breastfeeding right in front of you. Without blanket and everything. We kinda call it the one-eyed monster. Yeah...Argentina is weird.

Monday, December 30, 2013

We had dinner with the family and we had chicken and turkey and some salad. They also gave us presents! I got my first Argentine jersey! Well it's from a team here named BOCA. It's supposed to be the best team in Argentina. And it's an original and those are kinda hard to come by.

Christmas was pretty slow. We didn't work. Argentina is full of drunks during the holiday season hehe. So we stayed inside and had pancakes and...yeah..pancakes.

Chileans talk a lot faster than Argentines. It's like how a Californian talks basically. Go California!

Monday, January 6, 2014

His name is Andres. He is from Paraguay and has a wife and a kid who is 4. There isn't much about him, all that he was born Catholic and he seems a little interested in the Gospel.

Monday, January 13, 2014

Monday, January 20, 2014

First off, you know when you are in Argentina in the summer when a lady who is 70 years old comes out of a house that you clapped and is wearing a bikini. Grossest thing I have ever seen in my life I think.

Monday, February 3, 2014

Maybe if anybody is just looking to lose weight. Just do the Argentine missionary diet. Walk about 3 miles everyday and eat only breakfast, which is 2 eggs and a big lunch and drink lots of water. 100% guarantee with no interest. This week was pretty good. First I was sick, but I am a lot better now. There was another storm that happened here. So I totally got wet again. It's okay because it is supposed to be wife points right? That's what they say anyway. So it is kinda weird working in the coast.

Everywhere you go, people just don't wear shirts. Whether you are a guy or a girl. You just don't wear them. It's not cool to wear shirts I guess. But it is a whatever thing. Kinda used to it by now.

We didn't do very much that day, but we did go to eat some ice cream. The ice cream here is good, it's just missing something. American ice cream is where it is at.

Church was pretty exciting though. As we were having fast and testimony meeting. We hear some people yelling outside. Turns out, a guy had robbed the restaurant next door and went to the church to hide from the police. Ya know...I'm not even surprised that even happened. Weird stuff happens in Argentina. Super weird that I am calm and happy in the mission. Argentina doesn't contribute to it at all.

Monday, February 10, 2014

Argentina is kinda lame with computers and I can't send pictures every week.

So Thursday, La Familia Behotas, gave me and Elder Robison a farewell type thing. We had food and took pictures. The way Mormon Argentines have farewells.

While I was working with the Elders in Banfield, bunch of little things happened. I saw a dead animal in a pile of garbage on the side of the road. I think it was a dead cat. A little mini-flood happened, good thing we were teaching a lesson as it happened, and...a boy pulled a pistol on us! These three boys were playing on the other side of the street while we clapped a house and so the three boys came up to us and one said to the other, "Dale, Dale!" and so the other boy took out a gun and told us to give him our money. Lame thing was, it was a toy gun. It looked so fake that I can't even explain. So we just kept walking and they left us alone.

I hear that the area I am in right now that nothing happens. It's a bunch of fields and not much city.

Monday, February 24, 2014

going to a place called El Faro. It is a Villa o sea, a place where people get robbed, stabbed, and shot. Hopefully, none of that happens here.

To be honest, I'm kinda nervous to go over to a Villa. I have heard some crazy stories.

Another crazy thing that happened this week was that a TORNADO struck our area! It didn't do much, it just flipped a car and that is basically it. People were starting to freak out though. We went to go do some contacts and nobody was out on the streets! They were so scared to come out. Pretty sad actually.

And saying stuff about Argentina and how weird it is. Maybe it is just weird in our mission. I heard that northern Argentina is beautiful. Maybe I will go there one day.

Monday, March 3, 2014

He told us that just marriage isn't repentance and that they need to live the law of Chastity before marriage even occurs.

Marcos has a habit, where whenever he watches a BOCA game, he drinks one bottle of beer. He says he has a desire of 5 to quit.

We also had a wedding this week. One of our investigators named Angel got married to a menos-activo. Weddings in Argentina are kinda lame actually. All they really do is sign a paper, say a couple words and people throw rice on them. Pretty exciting, right? Then we went over to their little house and had mini pizzas and sandwiches. Weddings here are pretty rare because everyone lives together and live with their girlfriends and boyfriends. They live together for like 10 years too without getting married. There's no price in getting married, people are just too lazy to do it. Kinda lame really.

We also did service this week with Martín in his house that he owns. Sorry to say, but it was the grossest house ever...It was full of trash on one side and full of trash on the other side. So instead of putting the trash in a dumpster, we put sand over it to cover it up and make it look nicer. I don't know if that is good or not.

Well...I didn't get robbed, shot or stabbed this week. I did hear a lot of gun shots this week so that is pretty exciting.

Monday, March 10, 2014

The members in El Faro are super great! All have good hearts. There are a couple people who are gossiping and that's not good. El Faro is doing great! I guess the only scary thing that happened this week, was that we got gun pointed again. This time, we were at a bus stop and Elder Neyra made a phone call to see if someone could cut his hair. After the call, a guy who was standing behind us grabbed Elder Neyra and pointed a gun to his side and told him to give him the phone. I saw the gun and thought to myself, that is definitely not a real gun. Elder Neyra stands up and says to the guy, in spanish, "You want to rob me with your toy?" The guy's face was hilarious! He looked like he just got caught with drugs in his pocket. The guy told Elder Neyra that is was just a joke and then he walked away. It's was pretty sweet. I actually found out this week that the Argentina Buenos Aires South mission is the second most dangerous mission the world. The first is like India or something. But yeah, it's pretty exciting. Not a dull moment in Argentina. I swear though. This country is so corrupt and the government too. I give this country 20 years until it falls or something happens. But at least the people are super nice, well most are though. The culture here is kinda European, but at the same time it's Latino.

Elder Neyra called Martin again and found out that Martin just had to be in work before 8 and the baptism was at 5. They actually showed up an hour late to their baptism. Latin standard time.

Monday, March 24, 2014

Also, I heard about 50 gun shots outside of our apartment on Saturday haha so that we pretty exciting. This country is crazy haha love it.

SAN PAOLO BRASIL

Friday, December 6, 2013

Haha so one day, a couple weeks ago, we talked to Reginaldo, who's both a man and the slightest bit old! (ok, so only mid 50s. But whatever) He immediately confirmed my fear: "Hello, girls! You're very pretty!" Ok...let's talk about the gospel now. Hahaha. Anyway, it turned into the

longest contact ever (15 minutes?) where he told us that his family really did need the gospel, and that he and his wife were separating, and going through a bunch of other really hard things. Funny/interesting story--the other day we realized we were being followed by a man in a truck. Naturally, we were a little freaked out...finally, he pulled up next to us and told us that he had been following us even longer than we knew!! Uh....what?? Hahaha but it turned out to be a crazy "coincidence"--he saw us, wanted to talk to us, but didn't. Then he was in his car and saw us again--and decided that he'd try to talk to us this time! We marked down his address and said we'd stop by the next day. So with a lot of prayer that he wouldn't be creepy, we went...and he actually really, really wants to learn about the gospel!!! His name is Isaías, and he's SUPER receptive. And he really believes in what we told him. So that's kind of cool!

Monday, December 9, 2013

Sister Garner and I were noticing that everyone has Santa Clause climbing up ladders as decorations, or on a hang glider, or a parachute. What's up with that, we thought! Then we got it--no one has chimneys in Brazil! But everyone has walls surrounding their house, so he has to get over their walls! Aha!!! Hahaha so dang cute. Another fun tidbit--the words to the song that's the same tune as jingle bells is all about Jesus Christ. Super cute!

She had been worried that it would be hard to change her lifestyle, but told us yesterday that Saturday night, she had gone out with some friends. They all bought drinks, she bought water. They all danced, and she stood there. "I just didn't want to anymore. I didn't feel good there. But I felt good at church, and I feel good with you."

Tuesday, December 17, 2013

Monday, December 23, 2013

It's Christmas week!! How are you all doing? How's the SNOW? The sun's just lovely, thanks. :)

Monday, December 30, 2013

And we told them we were going to sing. So we "went caroling" (as close as I'm going to get to it in Brazil) and sang hymns, and then invited them all to learn more and gave them passalong cards with the address to the church on them. Some people were legitimately interested! Others just thought we were nuts. But it was fun :)

Monday, January 6, 2014

We were on our way walking to a house of a member after lunch when I wasn't paying attention and almost walked into a bus that was driving by...but it caught the drivers attention, and he waved at us. We waved back (we had already talked to him before a little, too) and he started motioning to us. "Do you want to get in?" "No, we don't have money" (true, and easier to say than we don't spend money on Sundays) "Come, get in!"

Soooo...we got a ride for free from a BUS. This doesn't happen, just so you know!

Monday, January 13, 2014

Monday, January 20, 2014

:) Oh, here's an interesting tidbit--missionaries are almost always the backup speakers when people don't show up to church. So normal...and happily, I'm getting used to speaking on a moments notice!

Monday, January 27, 2014

Monday, February 3, 2014

Monday, February 17, 2014

We did everything we could, but didn't get in touch with him. Finally, Saturday night he sent us a text message explaining that he had invited his brothers to come to his baptism, and they started

talking anti, and telling him it was the wrong choice to make. They didn't want to have any more to do with him. He started doubting his own ability to follow with faith, and he just got scared....it was really sad.

Monday, February 24, 2014

Monday, March 3, 2014

It's Carnaval so EVERYTHING is closed, and the place we're using doesn't have printers...so I have less time to actually write! But this week was incredible!

Monday, March 10, 2014

Wednesday, March 19, 2014

The weather's getting a lot better here. Holy cow, I'm so grateful. I'm pleased to say I never take "less hot" for granted. I will never forget January 2014...

We met with Eliane, the "wife" of a less active man. We honestly are just the happy Sisters who lucked out to be here at the right time--they were already planning on getting married, and she's been coming to church for years. But on Saturday they marked their wedding date in the Cartório! (I still haven't learned how to say that in English. But it's the place you can get legally married! haha) So then we marked a baptism date too, for the day after. Woohoo!!!!!!

Monday, March 24, 2014

It turns out that she is 100% nuts. Nuts. We were in her house and...it was exciting. She was screaming and attacking the washing machine and ripping down curtains...but a harmless nuts, because she likes us.

Tuesday, April 1, 2014

Doesn't Abril just sound so much nicer than Março? I'm so excited. Which is hilarious, because normally April's only exciting because it's spring and flowers and warmer weather. Whereas, here it's finally cooling off! Let's be serious for a second--I actually kind of want a t-shirt that says "I Survived January 2014", and then something about Salto on it.

Sunday, April 20, 2014

This week we moved houses. Surprise! Apparently our house wasn't very safe, so we got a call from the office the other day saying, "Hey, you guys are going to move. Can you pick up your keys tomorrow?" I love how smoothly these things are done...so fridge, stove, beds, the works all needed to be moved over to our new house. By ourselves. It was exciting...we enlisted the help of a recent convert and her friends, and a family from the ward, but it still took almost a full 2 days.

Sister Mills passed the Book of Mormons back to me, and a man sat down at my side. Have I ever told you how it still kind of scares me to talk to men? Literally, every time I do a contact with a man, I have to talk my brain into it first. And this guy was not super approachable! He's a large, bald black man, wearing sunglasses (in the bus!), and had headphones in. If he had been the first one to sit next to me, I think I might have justified not talking to him. But...I was already in teaching mode. So I picked up one of the Book of Mormons and stuck it in front of him. His name's Pedro. He's a young father, and a really good one. He was on his way to a job interview and just talked about how the new job would be so much better for his family. He really wants the best for them,

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

Did I mention I bought a fruit dress? Also, this dog follows me around for hours at a time, various days a week. Like, he looooves me. So I named him pretinho.

May 5, 2014

May 12, 2014

me I'd be transferred. Surprise! Bigger surprise--I was being transferred back to the interior (the half of the mission that's farther out from the big city. Basically, they're completely isolated sides...) to Sorocaba, The Parque Ouro Fino Ward. (that's fine gold park in english, so kind of funny)

Sorocaba is ridiculously cool. It's the third largest city in the state of São Paulo.

May 19, 2014

May 26, 2014

This week has been wet! And chilly! (Don't laugh--it really has. Brazil doesn't know how to protect from the cold. So....it feels colder than it is. Ok...you can laugh a little)

She's pretty confused about what to do religiously in her life. She was raised Catholic, and believes that baptism really is a commandment. But she feels that even though she learned good things in the Catholic church, that they lack authority to baptize. (Yes, those words left her mouth) She goes to another church now, that believes in reincarnation. But they don't believe in baptism, so she knows that can't be all right either.

Fun tidbits:

yesterday a cat entered the chapel through the window. Twice

Also yesterday, a member wanted to know my first name, so I told her to guess. She looked at me for a minute than said....

"Raquel."

I...think that might be it. I gave a talk yesterday!

OH! Almost forgot! Remember that devotional with Elder Russel M. Nelson? Umm....canceled.

Due to police riots or something ridiculous like that. Then we got grounded for the day, too, incase it got crazy. It didn't. So we just studied....and ate food. Haha, just what I needed.

June 2, 2014

Vânia works way too much and was in the hospital 3 days this week with a bad...throat something or another. I didn't really get it, but it sounded painful.

June 9, 2014

In other news, we started going on exchanges, and it's getting crazy. I'm going to Cerquillo this week! World Cup also starts--on days where Brazil plays, we can't leave the house after 4:00.

We'll lose so time to work, but we'll have extra time to plan and pray, soooo....it'll all work out :)

June 16, 2014

Laila and her husband, Manuel, are from Minas Gerais. They have a five year old daughter named Ketlin. Laila had a difficult childhood....life....and now, as a result, has a hard time opening up to people. She also has a hard time understanding things, but at the same time is very profound. I can't really explain Laila, but she's really special. In this time that we've gotten to know her, we've discovered that she's never really learned anything about God.

This week she had a dream. I don't know what it is with Brazilians and dreams, but it seems to be a theme recently! In the dream, her family was being chased and attacked. When it looked like hope was lost, she said the earth started to shake and she saw a man come down from the sky.

June 23, 2014

Tuesday: We had until 3:00 to work because of the World Cup. So we went out running!!

June 30, 2014

Monday, July 7, 2014

Craziness! Oh, World Cup. That's the other complicating factor. But we play tomorrow, and I think then on Sunday....and then it's over! I'll be honest, I've really like extra study time. Haha.

P.S. I never tied in the Subject line. Oops. :) Sister Ward is an American, clearly. This means...my 7th american companion out of 9 total! Gente, this isn't normal in Brazil! But yes, it's official. I'm proud to be an American!

Monday, July 21, 2014

Quickly, before I forget--do you remember when I was in Coffeyville, and I saw that turtle brutally killed in front of me? Well, this week the same thing happened...but with a dog. Ok, not the same thing. I didn't think the dog needed saving. But anyway, I saw a dog get ran over by a car this week, right in my front. Eck. Sister Ward just about died, too.

JAPAN TOKYO

Tuesday, July 23, 2013

Last Pday I went to my first Japanese festival! It was at a Buddhist temple, and everyone's just walking around eating food. I wore a Japanese yukata, I'll send pictures later.

This week was TOTEMO ATSUI! Japanese summer is soooo hot!

:) Chiba's amazing. Amen. Hontonni, The area is just jam packed full of people waiting to hear to the gospel. I can feel the miracles! Chiba ward has such dendou fire, I'm so stoked to start working more with them.

:) During the week Ramos 姉妹 had her last lesson as an investigator of the gospel and we made takoyaki! Tako: octopus yaki: flour, eggs, pickled ginger, and cabbage in little balls!

One 18 or so Japanese girl with her mom started waving at me because she thought I was so cute and said she'd come to Eikaiwa! Yay gaijin powah!

We met an obachan (grandma) after our mitsuketaikai (hand out flyers to find new investigators meeting) who invited us over to her house for breakfast! It was a real treat, Japanese breakfast isn't your normal breakfast. We had marinated vegetables and cookies. Right now she's just a potential investigator.

Chiba ward is SO GREAT, about half the members seem to speak English, and everyone's so patient and kind! And I'm beginning to learn exactly HOW small the world is. There are two families in Chiba ward that lived in Michigan for a couple years! One of those families was in the Ann Arbor 1st ward about 8 months ago.

At Eikaiwa there's a student who has a really big crush on me, and he says he loves me and runs away almost every week. I usually just smile and ignore the fact he's saying anything. But this past week he just came up and tried to hug me out of nowhere! I panicked! I didn't realize that in such a short time a hug from a male would be so scary! (he's like 20...by the way) Here's to hoping I won't be completely socially awkward when I come home.

Also I had cold-stone ice cream and a turkey sandwich on wheat bread. I felt SO at home, it was great. They don't sell turkey here at all...so I haven't been able to get my daily sandwich fix in for a while.

So here's something interesting about Japan: We had zone meeting in Matsudo on thursday (about half an hour by train) and as we're stopped and people are getting on the train this punk guy gets on and accidentally gets his foot caught in some nerdy guy's bag and he starts kicking it around like a punk. (you know the type). Anyway the punk sits down next to the other man and the other man says something to him under his breath (probably like, what a jerk thanks for kicking my bag around the train...atually we're in Japan, so he probably apologized) I was nervous that the punk was gonna start chewing the nerdy guy out or something because the punk bumps his shoulder like "excuse me, what did you just say"! But then they're all the sudden friends and the punk is slapping the nerd's knee and sharing his mints. Even when the punk's getting off, he pretty much trips out of the train because he's waving goodbye to his new pal. I

was so confused. I wish I could have recorded it, it was so interesting. Japan has no garbage, and no violence, and everyone's so friendly! At least that's what it seems like!

I did however get my helmet STOLEN yesterday, so Japan's not perfect I guess.

In Japan some clothes have English writing on them, however the majority of them make NO SENSE AT ALL. You'll see...also the title of this email is a good example.

Wednesday, November 13, 2013

Takahashi san is a serious smoker, he's been smoking for the majority of his life and he's in his 60s now. He can't go three hours without smoking, but his doctor has told him that for his health he really needs to stop.

She wants to get work off on Sundays but is so worried that she won't be able to. I always look back to the days in young women's where we roleplayed the scenario of asking our coach or our boss to not do certain things on Sunday and I've heard countless stories about how the boss was such a respecter of someone wanting to attend church...but I for some reason feel like it's a little different here in Japan, but she said she'll try!

at the culture day dance festival in Kumagaya!

eating Indian food with my bffs!

Also, she's really studying the Book of Mormon, she's reading it in English to practice her English, but of course she's going to learn a lot and feel a lot.

And to end on a super happy note, Sister Davis and I saw a man almost jump of a 5 story building...actually we were across the street the whole time eating at a restaurant and saw firetruck and ambulance and all that jazz drive by, but we didn't think anything of it. We walk out and there's a guy standing on the edge with two rescuers holding him up. I never thought that I would first-hand witness someone wanting to end their life. It really freaked me out, not just in the sense that people are so unhappy with their lives that they want to jump off a building, but also the fact that they don't understand where their going or why they're here in the first place. I'm pretty sure statistics say that Japan is one of the most depressed countries in the world, and I know that as one missionary I can't change the world, but this gospel is the answer. This message is going to hit Japan like wildfire one day, and I can't wait!

[Eikaiwa class](#)

A couple weeks ago we tried to do a mogi lesson with him (roleplay..to help with Japanese) he talked the whole time about cable TV and things of that sort, that we didn't get to teach him anything at all

[Still in kumagayyaaa](#)

As we began our p-day shopping and this girl comes up to us and we're talking to her about English, as always, and that leads into talking a little about the church. She seemed interested and we set up an appointment to meet. She's super cute, Chinese, 24, way stylin' etc. Kinjin. He had a student with him, and Roy started telling this student that we're Mormons and they always send out pretty girls to persuade people to join.

Also, Tuesday morning we did a roleplay with one of the members, she's a convert and it was so uplifting to hear her conversion story from Buddhism to Christianity. So we were all pumped and just going about our day, trying to find a bathroom actually, and as I was looking in one of the local shops to see if there was a toilet I totally SMACKED into a pole, head first. Luckily the pole was pretty hollow so it didn't hurt toooooo bad, but the sound was great. It could've been on America's funniest videos...except it happened in Japan...so I don't know if they take foreign films. But, after that things were crazy! This older woman, super skinny, wearing patent leather pants came up to me and Sister Davis and just started chatting us up. She was so funny, but kept

leaning on me and whispering in my ear like we were best friends. This woman was so sassy, just confidence exploding out of her head. It was great, as she was about to leave she points to her cheek and says "chu" which is the English equivalent of "mwa". So I kissed this old lady's cheek right on the street after knowing her for 3 minutes, and then she left....and I haven't seen her since. But I'm not sure what got into me, kissing old ladies wearing leather leggings on the street. I blame it on the head injury.

We handed out flyers for a little bit, with no luck and knew that we were going to watch conference in the morning so we really needed M&Ms for our special conference pancakes...during our quest for M&Ms, because all the sell in Japan is Japanese candy for some reason, we found our white friends! It was a miracle!

Yesterday we had a rough morning, we went to a new investigator's apartment, and she kept tempting us with all these things that any non-Mormon would find harmless I'm sure, and her Japanese and English both aren't perfect because she's from Indonesia, so communication was difficult. As we sat there in all of the worldyness surrounding us we just felt so dark and uncomfortable...the spirit was gone. There was no way of teaching her in that environment. I didn't realize just how corrupt the world is becoming until I set myself apart from it for a while. [miracles :\)](#)

We're pretty much celebrities in Japan. haha! Except I'm so surprised at the number of foreigners in Kumagaya...because Kumagaya is our in the country. Really close there's a huge population of Brazilians and Mexicans, but here we see lots of white people, and lots of Philipinos. It's an interesting thing, you wouldn't understand until you were always surrounded by Asians...on all sides...all the time. It's great! I love Japan!

YEsterday was a really cool miracle! So last week we met this really funny woman from Indonesia. We were handing out flyers for English class and she just came right up to me shook my hand and asked us where we were from and started telling us about her life. She said in 3 days she would call us...she never called! But she told us roughly how to get to her house because she wanted to cook for us. So yesterday, since we are always doing finding, wanted to go housing around her area to try to find her, but as we were waiting for the bus we were handing out more English flyers and she comes walking up to us again. She told us it was so amazing that she found us in the same spot because she was only in Kumagaya for one hour to work, and was picking up her new phone. She was sitting in McDonalds waiting for the same bus we were waiting for, but saw us and set up an appointment to come over. She's seemed to have a rough life, and really just wants to smile and be happy.

[Ai suru tomodachi to kazoku](#)

This week was like fear factor week or something! We got sushi at a sushi-go-round, and it was all really yummy but the last thing I ate was one of the weirdest grossest things I've ever had. I had to finish it though, because we're in Japan...and you finish everything you put on your plate, and (side-note) you're not supposed to eat and walk at the same time. BUT the scariest part of this week was the COCKROACH the size of my THUMB in our bathroom right before we went to bed a couple nights ago! It was the most terrifying thing I've ever faced! The bug's gone now, I totally destroyed the thing with a good shoe the elders left in our apartment. It was a 40 minute battle, everytime the thing crawled up the wall I screamed and cried and sister Davis was in the other room hyperventilating! It crawled inside our bathroom scale, and under our washing machine, and when I finally got it, it crawled up the side of washing machine and almost jumped on my face! I threw the washing machine and the beast made a run for our bedroom! I got him

though, he's dead. And we were able to sleep, for the most part. I can proudly say that I won that battle, and I honestly hope and pray I never have to go through that again.

We also went a whole week without bikes because we parked our bikes in the "no parking" zone when we went to District Meeting...the bikes were gone when we got back and went on a mad search for our bikes, found an English conversation school hoping someone knew enough English to help us. We met the nicest guy Roy who walked with us for an hour to find our bikes just to find that the place was closed til Saturday. I'm back on two wheels now though, so we're good.

Yesterday a couple retro ford thunderbirds drove up by the train-station while we were handing out flyers, they were blasting Funky Town and the asian kid in the drivers seat had an AFRO! I felt so at home. ;) haha!

[hot spot.](#)

So Kumagaya is the hottest place in Japan! Literally, I'm living in a hot spot. It's not too bad now that it's cooling down a little all over the country. I'm ready for it to really feel like fall though. I heard October is super nice though, so we'll see!

Sister Davis and I have a lot in common, one of our goals at the beginning of our mission was to become regulars at a ramen shop and convert the people that work there. Ramen shops are usually full of a bunch of punk boys though, so I kind of abandoned the goal. But now, in Kumagaya there's this really cute bagel shop with a few hip college students that play guitar and like bagels and such! haha, we kept walking by and saying hi while we were streeting and after about the 5th time we finally went in. They mentioned that they were talking about how they really wanted us to come in.

[Kumagaya!](#)

[hello!](#)

rode my bike an hour and a half in POURING rain to see a potential investigator-she's Hindi, from India, but says we can come back anytime. She's interesting, that religion/culture is very different from anything I've ever heard of.

[all is well, all is well](#)

This week we had stake conference! And there was English translation! It was the first Sunday meeting I've actually understood in almost 6 months, so that was good!

I saw the ocean this week when we went out to visit some less actives. The apartments over there are soooo fancy, we ended up not visiting anyone because the apartments are on lockdown. It looked like Florida over on the coast, palm trees, lots of shopping, ocean, blue sky. So pretty...and we were just on the gulf side of Chiba Prefecture.

[Baptisms are great!](#)

We've done a lot of streeting, which is when we go out and just try to stop people and talk to people on the streets. Our technique has changed a lot from day to day...we're trying to figure out the best approach. Do we yell "sumimasen! (excuse me) watashitachi wa 'Matsu Jitsu Seito Iesu Kirisuto kyokai' no borantia senkyoshi to imasu!" (We're the missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints"...or do we go for a more sly approach 'suteki wanpitsu! doko ni kaimashita ka? watashitachi wa Amerika kara kimashita!' (pretty dress! where did you buy it? We're from America!) We're still working on it, might even have our zone leaders come in and help us out a little.

[Birthday Week!](#)

She's half Japanese, and can understand most of what people are saying to us! It's perfect!

The next day, we all went back to Eva and Catherine's house and we had a little birthday party with good Philipino food and birthday cake :)

[Chiba!](#)

So this week we had lots of finding time, did some streeting at an international languages university where everyone's studying English and is super stoked to talk to an American!

SWEDEN

Friday, October 18, 2013

I've been assigned to my first area which is... the Stockholm South area! I guess it is primarily in a city called Hagersten.

Monday, October 21, 2013

Sweden was lookin mighty beautiful and I was welcomed by former Ambassador of Sweden, President of the Sweden mission, Gregory Newell. What an honor!

The area we are assigned to is the Stockholm south area, more specifically, Hagersten. If there is a ghetto place in Sweden, this is probably it. Although it is not a very wealthy part of Sweden, it has been pretty challenging preaching the gospel here at times because most of the people are either devout Muslims, or cannot speak Swedish or English well at all. So it makes things interesting!! The diversity here is huge!

Her name is Angie and she is SO cool!! She's from Honduras and has one of the biggest Afros I've ever seen in my life. We were actually worried that her hair wouldn't fit in the baptismal font hahah I wish I had that kind of hair!!

Sweden isn't going to be an easy place to share the gospel. That fact is very apparent. BUT deep down, the hearts of men and women are the same everywhere, and when we open our mouths, their hearts will hear. They do hear! I've seen it time and time again and I've only been here a few days. Sweden is so beautiful and I love the people here so much! Everyone goes into shock when they hear my Swedish and find out that i've only been here for a few days. Literally, thousands probably have asked at this point how my Swedish is what it is.

Monday, October 28, 2013

I have been serving in Sweden for about two weeks now, have taught many lessons, and only one of those lessons has been with an actual Swede haha I have had TONS of lessons with Nigerians (I always just talk about Nigerian stew and somehow it opens their hearts every time hahah), people from Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Uganda, Syria, Columbia, Chile, Honduras, Italy, and basically ALL OVER! All kinds of people except Swedes!! I can't even remember half of the countries! The diversity here along with the poverty is actually SUCH a blessing!!! I had this idea that I'd be teaching blonde haired blue eyed meatball loving people for two years but I was sooooo wrong. The biggest obstacle thus far is just being able to communicate with so many people from different places with different languages. It's a blast though and this is definitely the place for me! Love it!!

Last thing. Earlier this week, there was a night where I kept feeling something crawling on me in my sleep. I couldn't stand it anymore so I turned on the lights to find out that I have bed bugs!!! WOooooooooooooo!! I was the only one in my apartment that had not gotten them yet, and boom! there they were. Ever since that night, I've had hundreds, literally, of little red/itchy bites allllll over my body, with a few more being added each night, regardless of where I sleep or what I do to prevent them from eating me alive. Välkommen till Sverige as they say in Sweden!! So I can't really say that I've been sleeping tight, but I can say that I've been letting the bed bugs bite ;) So I prayed last night that somehow I would be able to stop the bed bugs from destroying me

physically and mentally, and then I just felt like I should go look in this closet. So I did and Wham!! A brand new bottle of OFF spray, that was like the deep woods, tic proof, bed bug proof, bomb proof kind!!!! Alma 36:20--"And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain". That scripture explains my feelings with precision. Needless to say, I showered myself and my bed in OFF bug spray before bedtime. I slept like a baby :)

Monday, November 4, 2013

This week has definitely been another adventure. The theme of the week--more bed bugs!

They're not just in the beds

now though, but they are in everything!! A few days ago, I felt crawling all over my neck, but kind of just ignored it because the bed bugs kind of drive you mentally insane if you pay too much attention to them. So I go look in the mirror later that night, and there were literally 40-50 bites all in the same area of my neck!!! So it was a little embarrassing at church the next day, but I like to think that every bed bug bite that I get will be another blessing for me because I am doing it for Jesus Christ.

Monday, November 11, 2013

We were invited to a mosque, and you should have seen the faces of all the Muslims as they saw two Mormon missionaries in their mosque hahahha. They were a bit confused and definitely SHOCKED!! We made sure that it was okay to be there of course, but the funniest part was that three Muslims who invited us and swore they would be there never showed up!! SO funny!! So we ended up just meeting a lot of Muslims who were very kind and seemed very impressed by our willingness to go to a mosque and then just observing their worship as we waited for our "no show" friends. It was great!

We were also invited to a Protestant church this week, and one of our investigators invited us to a Seventh Day Adventist church. Sadly, we did not have time to make it to both, but we did attend the Seventh Day Adventist church and it was great as well. It was a nice service and the people were also very kind and welcoming, as were the Muslims. The people there also seemed a little confused why the Mormons were there, but they expressed they too were very impressed that we were attending a service of another faith. Afterwards we had a vegetarian lunch with the congregation, because they don't eat meat, and there were two guys who whipped out their bibles and just basically yelled at us for three hours about how the bible says the sabbath is on Saturday and how it says not to eat pig. All we did was listen, smiled, and bore testimony when given the occasional 2 seconds to speak. It was very interesting!

Monday, November 18, 2013

. I said goodbye to Southern Stockholm on Wednesday to head to a new city in Sweden at the southern tip of Sweden called Malmö. It's the third biggest city in Sweden and it's very very beautiful. To compare it to America, it has kind of a southern California feel to it, and the people all have like a deep southern accent. I'm literally a 10 minute walk from the beach, and it's actually not too cold here, so we've got a lot of positive things working for us. :) This morning I actually got to run the beach and it was SO gorgeous. You could basically see Denmark from where we were running so it was cool. I also got to visit the biggest mall in Scandinavia today (I've just heard it's the biggest, but you never really know things as a missionary) called

Emporium. It's a really great area, almost as diverse as the last, and I'm excited to work hard here!

Monday, November 25, 2013

Cold cold cold here in Sweden! I hope everyone is doing well and having a great time preparing for Thanksgiving! Much to be thankful for :) The relief society in Sweden is grateful for missionaries this year, so I got to enjoy a little turkey and potatoes myself this week! What a blessing that was. Eat tons more for me though!!

Jerry is from Ghana and originally came to Sweden to play professional soccer, but ended up injuring himself and is now in school to be an electrician.

Monday, December 2, 2013

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving and got lots of food and family time in! I got to spend Thanksgiving day teaching Jerry, along with several others, which was definitely something to be thankful for. I'll make up for lost turkey in a few years :)

So this week, we found three new Nigerian investigators, which were definitely the highlight of the week.

Their foundation is already built on Christ and they are such believing people! It has been a completely different experience thus far when meeting with a Swede haha.

Monday, December 9, 2013

We had a Christmas concert here in Sweden this week which included some opera, some classical music, a lot of singing, and even some gospel music!!

There was a mini hurricane called Sven and the weather made things pretty crazy, but public transportation being shut down, parts of houses flying all over, ocean water flooding in, and things shattering and breaking left and right is no excuse not to be doing missionary work, right? haha My companion and I joked that going out anyways (even though we weren't really supposed to) and working hard in that weather would be a great story for our grandchildren one day, so that's what we did! We sure did get some stories. People probably either thought we were crazy dedicated to Christ or just plain crazy but I saw many miracles come from it and I even saw Swedish snow for the first time ever! Christmas is here OFFICIALLY!

Monday, December 16, 2013

I have to say that the fact remains, Christmas is still the best time of the year. It gets even better on a mission--believe it or not. I got to sing We Wish You a Merry Christmas and Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer in front of the entire stake on Saturday and it went great! They wanted some American culture and that's what I gave 'em

On Saturday I got to baptize a man in the ocean!!! Anyone have a wet suit I could borrow? hahaha Cold!

Friday, December 27, 2013

This week I was blessed with one of the greatest Christmas gifts of all-time. I got to baptize a man named Innocent in the ocean. Innocent is from Zambia and he is one of the coolest people. He didn't care that it was the darkest day of the year in Sweden, or that the water probably could

have killed us--he just wanted to be baptized in the ocean. So here's how it went...

I'll be honest, I was a little nervous about stepping waste-deep into the ocean for several minutes on literally the darkest day of the year in Sweden. It was freezing cold outside, as you can imagine, and we even had quite a bit of rain and wind going that day. So after a little pre-baptism ceremony, we made our way out to the ocean to perform the baptism. Innocent and I stepped into the ocean and made our way out while the ward members and missionaries stood watching.

At first, when I made my way in, the water hit me like a train and I almost couldn't breathe. Innocent was struggling as well and the first thought that came to my mind was that there is no way that this baptismal prayer is going to make it out of my mouth. I can't even breathe, so how am I going to speak?

Monday, January 13, 2014

Happy 2014 everyone!! I hope that everyone had a wonderful holiday season and has recovered from all of the food and festivities over the past few weeks--unless you had as many Swedish meatballs as I did, then you're probably still struggling. ;)

Even though Sweden is statistically the most atheist country in the world, the Lord's work is moving forward here and people are flocking to His true church. I'm lucky to be here to watch it happen.

Monday, January 27, 2014

Monday, February 3, 2014

Some gangster thug tried to beat him up yesterday, so that was interesting. I felt like Jesus when I calmly put a stop to all of that nonsense. Goodness gracious

Tuesday, February 25, 2014

As for Sweden, it's finally starting to warm up a little and I think I saw the sun twice this week, so i'm pretty excited about that. I think the Swedes are too. Haven't seen this many people outside during the day since I arrived here. You really don't know how many people live in this country until the sun shows itself and then bam! Out they come haha

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

Here's a Jesus pic for ya'll. We were all shocked when we saw Jesus' name in Sweden, but here's the evidence!

Sunday, March 16, 2014

This week I also decided to do a little experiment as well to see if there really are as many atheists as statistics say there are in Sweden. Well, so far, there pretty much are. We met about one or two people every day, at most, that believe in God. However, we had some really interesting and long conversations with many atheists. Some say they are atheist because they never had God growing up in Sweden and had really never thought about Him. Others because they thought God and the bible are just good story telling. There were several reasons. Darwinism was definitely a belief shared by many of them and life after this was not. It was interesting to see so many people just say that they truly believe it's all over when they die. Man, they're going to be shocked! And in regards to Darwinism, honestly, and in my opinion, I did not hear a single logical explanation as to why these people did not believe in God as our creator.

My testimony was strengthened that God lives, we are His children, He loves us, and He wants us back!

Thursday, March 20, 2014

This week was a great one! Our mission received iphones this week and I have to say, it's a lot nicer asking "Siri" where things are instead of pulling out a huge map in the middle of the city that takes two people to hold. At times, I almost feel like i'm breaking a rule by talking to "Siri" because over the course of my life, i've only ever talked to one Siri! haha We could definitely "fit in" a lot better in this country now, but walking around in suits and talking about Jesus still makes us as far from "fitting in" as possible. The iphones are an awesome tool though and help out a ton!

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

It's going to be fett najs, as we say in Sweden. (aka incredible!)

Monday, March 31, 2014

However, as we attended the post-blessing celebration, all of the friends and family that I talked to said that they really enjoyed the service and thought it was very nice. (Swedes don't say that unless they mean it)

This week I also had the opportunity to sit down with a few of my Nigerian friends, member and non-member alike, and have a little fufu with stew. The stew probably had about 20 different meats in it from different parts of different animals, and it was so good! I tried to make it once by myself, but I think it was much better coming from the hands of an authentic Nigerian. The best part of it all, was with full bellies and all, being able to share the gospel and be fed spiritually in the end.

I hope everyone is doing great. Make some fufu and stew if you're looking for a good cultural experience.

Monday, April 21, 2014

We ended up talking to a ton of people and it felt so good to be out sharing why we celebrate Easter. Testifying of Christ's resurrection and showing people how it has everything to do with them was so cool. Making it clear that because of our savior Jesus Christ and because he rose again, means that everyone else can too. #BecauseofHim

Monday, May 26, 2014

We have been teaching a lot on the street lately, and just trying to meet as many people as possible. People in Sweden actually come outside now!

The only problem that we are having with meeting all of these new people is that school just ended, so everyone in this country has plans to leave to some exotic place for the next three months. Personally, if I lived in Sweden as a non-missionary, my exotic vacations would be during Sweden's exotic winter. Haha! The summers here are amazing.

RIO, BRAZIL

November 25, 2013

I am not one to hide details about dead birds, cats, and dogs in the middle of the street or how they are honestly very few things about Brazil that I love, and how I don't have the desired to return to this corner of the world...

We ate lunch at a special restaurant in Campo Grande – think Tucanos but with pizza! It was a really good. I ate way too much. My food baby - Juan Pablo is going pretty rapidly. It was like \$10 for an unlimited gourmet pizza and drinks!

The practice went infinitely better than the first time. We arranged to have our coordination meeting at the church, but Carlos was about an hour late. But he brought cake as a peace offering, and paid me the highest complement of, "you look pretty today, when it's hot out, you look less pretty." (I think direct translation of Portuguese is weird.) I'm glad that when it's not 110 degrees out, and I'm not covered in filth and sunscreen with my hair wadded in a ball, that can still look halfway presentable.

That's one thing I've noticed here – the principles of love pain joy and suffering are universal. Never before has compassion been such an important characteristic for me to develop. Everyone needs to know of the marvelous promise of the Savior, that we are never alone in this journey. Christ has felt everything, sickness, sadness, pain, and is waiting for us to accept his sacrifice. It is VERY easy to focus on all of the things that I legitimately HATE about Brazil. HATE. I am seriously LOATHING the sticky floors and cockroaches/ants/snails/spiders/beetles/knats/mosquitos haha. Other things that I can't stand-- dogs mating in the streets, kittens dying on "sidewalks", the uneven streets, garbage everywhere, rivers of sewage, NOISE, etc.....

Monday Dec. 2, 2013

We started teaching A., who is a single man in his 50's. He is really nice and welcoming, but he belongs to "Assemblaya de Deus", which is a predominant and particularly loud/obnoxious church down here. Typically, members of that church don't listen and just want to bible bash. Alberto was this way as well, but we're working with him.

T(27) and M(17) are not legally married. T is working really hard and desires to find answers. We've taught him 3-4 times and he asked good questions. He has also asked pastors of different churches what they know about Christ establishing a church...much like how Joseph Smith searched for the truth. Hopefully, we can continue to help T find his answers.

Monday December 9, 2013

I got my Christmas package and I was able to salvage just about everything – magazines included.

Carlos and another Irmao gave me a priesthood blessing and then Carlos drove us home. Picture 3 women, 2 small children shoved in the back of a VW rabbit, then add heat, the lack of driving rules, speed bumps, uneven roads, etc...NOT my favorite part of my mission!)

(side note: Hospitals in Brazil are definitely not a sterile environment, and I definitely doubted the education of the VERY young doctors. I wanted to see credentials of know if the screening process involved a real doctor, but my language skills aren't quite there and I think it might have come across too rude.)

(Other side note: I have people fussing over especially in a foreign language. "How are you feeling?" "Sick" "Are you feeling any better?" "No." "What have you eaten lately?" "Nothing" "Do you know what made you sick?" "No" – unless it is the 100 different theories of what sickness I could have under the current living conditions I am in. I tried to smile and appreciate their signs of concern, but all I wanted was solid medical advice.)

Monday, December 30, 2013

HOLY RAIN!!! The roads flooded and lots of houses were damaged. We had a zone conference which was awesome. Spiritual nourishment for 8 hours. It didn't even matter that we got up at 4:30 and traveled for 3 ½ hours.

Navigating is really difficult. The roads here are a ramshackled mess with no apparent patten for numbering houses. That, coupled with my amazing natural sense of direction has led to a lot of wandering/walking/asking people for directions.

Monday, January 6, 2014

Christmas came and went without a fuss. There is very little Christmas spirit here unless you count setting off bombs/fireworks as a way of bringing the spirit of Christmas.

It began with looking at he ward missionary roster to try to find the Sister's address for our lunch appointment. I have been there twice before, but I was always following Sister Z and trying to process the language and dodging dying kittens in the street. Turns out that her address is still registered under her Mom, but she has moved. I then tried calling her mom, the RS president, the RS councilors, the old RS president, another sister, our ward mission leader...NO ONE answered their phones. Also, we switched phones at zone conference so no one has our new phone number. Unfortunately, this is the same hypersensitive sister who has a new baby and I had been warned never to stand her up or else. Anyway, I felt terrible but had not choice but to stay home for lunch. I also had a district meeting at 2:00, which was going to be very hard to make from our lunch appointment. Anyway, it was a mess. At 1:30 I got a very angry phone call from this sister (don't know how she got my number, except from the FIVE calls I placed to her!) (Also: we have very limited number of minutes on our phone. I will definitely run out this month). I tried to explain our situation but all that she understood was that we had already eaten and that we weren't going to her house because we don't like her, and don't like her food or her baby, and maybe the world was going to end. More sincere apologies from me followed...and then it was time to move on. Honestly, I completely forgot about it until the RS president pulled my companion and me aside after a RS function and chewed me out for not going to a lunch appointment. Later in the week the WML and my DL also gave me a dose of "how dare you miss a lunch appointment with a member." Again I tried to apologize and explain the situation, but Brazilians seem to have little sympathy for a directionally challenged American missionary who is training a green missionary with only 11 weeks in Brazil herself. It is remarkable that one lunch missed due to circumstance beyond our control is the end of the world. The good news is that I can let it go.

People began showing Christmas spirit by setting off fire-works/mini-bombs on a 1-2 minute basis, and drinking massive amounts of alcohol, and blasting 90's music with the occasional commercial Christmas song.

Christmas here is very different from home. They have a huge meal on Christmas Eve at midnight on Christmas Eve/morning - and then sleep in really late the next day. Then, the next day (Christmas day) is filled with food and family. There is very little music and spirit of Christmas. Sister Brown and I had a special moment at the end of our long day. It is so wonderful to have someone with your came culture and many of the same emotions to share things with. I hope that we will stay in contact after out missions.

How can it be hotter? SO MUCH HOTTER! I think that it reached 106 ish plus humidity. Sooo. STINKIN. HOT! My companion is a Rio native, so she is not dying like me. I reapplied my 50-70 SPF sunscreen and spent the entire day walking around with my umbrella and drinking (water) like a sailor.

I know that this is the Lord's work – if not, I would have buckled and quit a long time ago, leaving this dirty, ramshackled city behind.

Monday, January 13, 2014

Kite-flying is a big thing here. On the weekends you will see many grown men flying kites.

January 16, 2014

Some of you might have heard about the big lightening storm in Rio this past week that damaged the thumb of the Christ the Redeemer statue. It was really powerful and awesome, and I hid the whole time in a member's house. I have ruled out Storm Chasing as a future profession.

Crappy day...long...hot...unproductive. Though, we did have a good finish by visiting two elderly disable ladies. They remembered us and asked us how our work was going. As we shared stories and scriptures with them I felt the love of Christ and a desire to reach out and touch these women.

Monday January 20, 2014

We had a crazy rain and thunderstorm! The roads flooded and I've never experienced lightening so close before. We were blessed to be with a member and close to a member's house when the storm hit. We waited out the worst of it and returned to our house early, only to discover that our roof was leaking on our kitchen's side and had a good 4-5 inches of standing water. I love Brazil. Also every time we use the washing machine, the "septic system" backs up and seeps feces infested water inside. Not cool!

I love and miss you all. P-days are hard, especially as I think of and remember all of you. I am lonely. I miss clean floors and being able to flush toilet paper. I miss my country and my home.
Jan. 27, 2014

Our Zone Leaders called a zone fast yesterday, and my immediate response was, "I am sick and it is over 95 degrees...I'm not fasting." However, I have learned from past experiences not to voice my concern or rationalizations. Once, the zone leader said (when I voiced that I would not be fasting from water in 104 degree conditions) that my "biology knowledge" was getting in the way, and that I needed to have more faith. Three days later we got strict guidelines from the Mission president's wife to NOT fast in these extreme conditions, and if necessary, schedule the fast on a P-day so that we would not be out in the heat working. There have been a lot of health problems in the mission related to this lately. The other time I raised my concern, this same leader made it a point to lecture us on obeying our leaders, having "real" faith and the "correct way to fast – maintaining eye contact with me nearly the whole time. Ugghh! It's just not right to make accusations or lectures on a personal matter that should be between a person and the Lord. I believe that the Lord has power to do all things, but I also know that as our loving Father, he wants us to do all things in wisdom. For me, that means not fasting from water in 100 degree plus weather, especially when I am sick, and especially during a full day of proselyting. We invited A., a young 14 years old recent convert of about 9 months, to join us in our teaching. We don't normally asked such young members to teach with us, but I felt that she would be great. Her mother recently started chemotherapy and is having lots of trials. Our appointment was actually home (milagre #1), and Sister S. taught well (milagre #2), and N. accepted to be baptized (milagre #3). Her son-in-law then arrived and we ended up teaching him more about the Book of Mormon, then he too accepted to be baptized! (milagre #4) Little A. bore a sweet and simple testimony. She seemed to be in much higher spirits after the lesson, and asked if she could go out with us again. I am so glad that she had a good experience! The low point of the day was walking for hours in the hot sun. I think that I might be heat stroked after today, either that or I am getting what my companion had. Version:1.0

I was feeling sick and dizzy after church, I think due to the heat, so I rested a couple of hours and then went back to work. We visited M. and her cute 11 year old neighbor E. I have to admit that I am terrified of teaching and baptizing children because it is so easy for them to fall away without family support. But E. is not your typical 11 year old. She has already visited a

lot of other churches and is actively searching for the truth...seriously, at 11 years old! ...Time will tell, but I am very very cautious. I think that my realism is impeding my ability.

I am having a problem today of a recurrent UTI/kidney infection. IT SUCKS! It is not debilitating, but it is a pain because if I push through I end up feeling 10 times worse at the end of the day. I went back to the doctor and he changed my antibiotics so I hope this one works better. We had orders from Sister Lima to stay in the house all day yesterday and to drink 5 liters of water....that seemed like a LOT of water to me! (side note: we sent her some information on water toxicity, and when too much is harmful.) But I did it and but I really don't feel well. One thing that I know for sure is that I will not be fasting again when I am sick.

Letter written on Monday, February 10

Anyways, after some planning, Sister S. and I did a companion exchange with Sister C. (the super cute young looking Brazilian that arrived with me and is serving in Campo Grande.) THREE hours of hell public transportation (106+ degrees on an unairconditioned bus) later, we arrived to receive our "training". It was 45 minutes of keep the rules, do practices, and whatever mistake your newbie makes is your fault. Then we spent the next FOUR hours getting back to our area. Long. Frustrating. On the upside, Sister C. is a delight! She's super positive and kind.

Anyways, we arrived at the chapel and were still waiting on the American visa-waiters to arrive, so we got to talk to the other newbies – a LOT of American elders, Sister R, and only one other Peruvian sister. I talked with the sisters and afterwards thought to myself, "this tiny Brazilian sister is really sharp!" We hit it off well.

It never drops below 86 degrees even at night. Yesterday it was 104.8 with a heat index of 113.0...HOT!

Monday February 17, 2014

We also invited a lot of people to go on church tours. Our chapel is one of the biggest and nicest buildings in Santa Margarida, and many people are curious to see inside.

We came home early today so that we could MOVE!!!! No more cockroaches and living next to a chicken slaughterhouse (oops, I don't think that I ever told you about that part of my living conditions.)

Anyways, back to the move. It was actually legitimately fun. P-day clothes, cool weather, and a break from the daily grind. The Elders were beasts and we got just about everything moved in and unpacked and organized by 12:30 pm. I made the Elders cookies and French toast so they were pretty happy. Our new house is PERFECT. It is nice, and not just "Brazil nice", but actually nice-nice! (minus the cold showers which is next on my problems that need to be solved list). The house is huge and has THREE bathrooms!

There is a reason why us Americans have to bring our personal hygiene supplies with us to Brazil...because people don't use tampons at all down here. There are lots of fears and misconceptions down here, which have led to a few biology lessons with the companions.

Sunday February 23, 2014

Well, I can feel pride and selfishness start to creep back into my life. Perhaps the shift in self-righteous thinking may be partially attributed to our recent change of living quarters. Our old house was VERY humble and VERY dirty. We were confined to tight quarters with all of the sisters in close proximity. These circumstances were difficult when it came down to using our one tiny bathroom. But there was very little drama because it was impossible to talk behind someone's back there. Here in the "big house" things are a lot more comfortable. With comfort comes pride and with pride comes judging.

We had a “caplea aberta” activity in Campo Grande today. I will once again re-iterate how much I HATE the Campo Grande area. People are rude, pushy, and constantly in a hurry. I am speaking Portuguese quite comfortably now, but many people in Campo Grande were like “She talks with a weird accent, therefore she is stupid, therefore I will only talk to the Brazilian.” It is remarkable how people can completely ignore your presence while simultaneously asking your companion questions about you. I remember experiencing this during the first few transfers, but I have been speaking well lately, so this attitude was super obnoxious today. I love my little, kind, dirty, humble Santa Magarida.

Side note: A member asked me where I was from the other day and was surprised when I said that I was American. She thought that I was South American.

ST and EP bore their testimonies because they were the newbies, and man they have strong spirits. There were about ten other people who bore their testimonies, but those two stuck out to me. I am so happy that they are here and so happy to feel the special spirit that so often filled our room at the MTC. You can tell that ST and EP are still in the culture shock stage where you are just constantly running on adrenaline, but they are both speaking really well!

The referral was for his wife and daughter. When we went to share a message with them, it started raining so they invited us in their garage, where Senhor was. His wife is a firm member of a different church. She told us that we would be wasting our time teaching her husband because he had never shown interest in joining a religion. He’d also never prayed before. But he was a good husband, father, and grandfather.

This was a weird day. We met a self professed “profeta” (prophet) today. She was stamping her feet and yelling that we aren’t Christians.

Next week is Carnival in Rio... a wild and crazy time for sure. We are restricted from leaving our house after 4:00 pm because of all the shenanigans. It will be a boring week for us!

March 31, 2014

Emailing home was rough, but other than that I am feeling all right. I’m sleeping and eating well, and my digestive system is normalizing. If only I could get our shower heater to start working!

I feel unusually calm and completely at peace. The fact that our shower is still cold and our toilet doesn’t flush isn’t driving me crazy anymore.

Thursday, April 10, 2014

Sister Brown and Sister Jamieson and I continued our Campo grande tradition of cooping up in the outdated family history center –it was awesome. We got to spend almost the entire weekend in AIR CONDITIONING!!! There were about 1,000 mosquitoes in our room, but man oh man was it worth it! It sounds really terrible, but it was soooo nice to leave our investigators with our companions and listen to and speak English while munching on snacks and sharing missionary experiences with one another. It was a wonderful, spirit filled weekend.

Monday, April 14, 2014

We are starting an English class! We have to have 30 people participating and it can only be one hour once a week. (Yes, President Lima is very strict!) I explained this to Carlos, and he was doubtful that we could meet the requirements.

Ge. and Jo. (15 and 12 year old). I love these girls so much. They come from very humble backgrounds, but they are some of the happiest, funniest girls I know. Jo. is a crackup. I wish that I could video one of our lessons with her because it is really hard for us to keep from completely busting up and losing the spirit of the lesson. Ge. is more reserved, but she is already talking about when she will serve a mission. She has already asked her dad about it, and he has

been asking us all sorts of questions. Their prayers are beautiful. They pray for everyone, calling them by name, and ask for such simple blessings. They are very grateful for all that they have and say things like, “we are thankful for food and light in our house.” It reminds me of President Uchtdorf’s talk on the spirit of gratitude. These humble Brazilians are teaching me a lot about how to be happy regardless of our circumstances.

Leo., Mar., Jor. – The verdict is still out on this family. The first hurdle is to help them get legally married, but they both want to be baptized. Mar. says that she has already been taught by the missionaries and she has read the Book of Mormon and knows that it is true and knows that Joseph Smith was a prophet.

We have had nearly a week now with virtually no work...but at no fault of our own....conference, P-day, and FOUR DAYS staying at home because of Sister R. sickness – poor thing! She vomited for two days straight – and if was made even worse because she never received a health card (insurance card). Sooo...we had the “joy” of going to a public hospital. It was very interesting to observe how things are run down here, but I didn’t touch anything or sit close to anybody...!

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

We did the kind of things that you can’ do in Santa Margarida. I hate. Campo. Grande! It is a very cool 60 degrees and still raining. We are on divisions with Campinho and it is so nice to get a break from training.

Thursday, July 3, 2014

We had a great lunch with Bishop Roberto Alvino and Priscila (and her parents). They made us Brazilian churrasco, which was GREAT! Bishop taught me how to cut and prepare the meat. I ate WAY too much meat, especially considering the amount of garlic on the meat. It was delicious, but I am going to pay for it!

The rest of the day was frustrating and discouraging with lots of rain, and lot of appointments that fell through.

Well, I figure I better write a real update and get caught up in my journal. First, having an American companion is really great! I feel like things are so much easier when you have the same culture.

Our work had been really odd because of the World Cup. We will have a few really great teaching days and start gaining momentum, then we are stalled because there will be a Brazil game and we have to stay at home. President Lima has done some creative rescheduling to help us work as much as possible. For example, last Tuesday was a Brasil game so he moved our P-day from Monday 10am-6 pm to Tuesday 3 pm – 10:30 pm. Today we had a normal day of work until 1:00 when we emailed our families and then we had to come home by 3 and stay in for the rest of the day. It’s really not too bad for a change, but they only let us know with about a day’s notice. This means that we often have to make last minute changes to our appointments and that gets pretty annoying. I like making plans and sticking to them especially when they involve other people.

Work is very different here in zona Mereere. All of the areas are HUGE, and all of the missionaries live really far away from one another. For example, today we had our district meeting in Cabo Frio – 2 hours by bus. TWO hours! Add up the travel time and the meeting time and you get 6 hours of non-proselyting activities. I did do some street contacts while waiting for the bus, and talked to the crazy lady sitting next to me, but she dominated the conversation and ten started singing various gospel songs...it was a little strange. I definitely will not miss riding on public transportation.

We had a great division with Sister Bobelany and Sister Zarate. It was so good to work with SZ again after these 7 months. I was able to thank her for her patience in helping me to get through the intense culture shock phase of my mission.

Today was another odd day of work because of the World Cup. We worked from 10-12:00, then stayed in doing our weekly planning until 18:00, then went out and worked. Brazil won their game and everyone went CRAZY...really CRAZY. Haha! Like running into the street and taking off their clothes crazy! Gotta love our neighbors!

We had a great lesson with Al. and Fl. Al. has been coming to church for almost a year and has a great desire to be baptized; only he isn't married to Fl., and he is Argentinean. So he has to retrieve papers from Argentina that say that he is not married there before he can get married here. But even then, FL. doesn't want to get married...complicated! But we had a great lesson, which was led by the Spirit.

Today we got lost on the way to lunch #likethatssomethingnew, and then we had to travel to Andarai (centro do Rio) 4-5 hours in a bus. I discovered that there are games on our ancient cell phone, so I played sudoku and brain games for a good chunk of the trip. Sister B mostly just slept. We are trying to be a lot smarter about taking care of ourselves physically so I am happy that she is able to sleep. We are also trying to eat better, more healthy choices, and just plain more food (especially my comp.)

PHILIPPINES (CEBU)

Lions, Tigers, and BAPTISM (May 22, 2013)

OK this week me and elder warner went for a run in the morning and found that bengal tiger I was talking about. Turns out, the owner has 6 tigers and 6 lions, so we got to pet them and everything. So sweet...

Baptism! (May 28, 2013)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2013

I'm getting transferred to Negros!! I'm moving to another island tomorrow morning! It's an emergency transfer so i only had a 2 days notice. It's bittersweet cuz Negros is awesome, its called the "Promised Land" but I've loved Mabolo so much. I dont think you know.

I wish you could meet these people I work with and teach every day: Brother Syke and his bald head and wide smile and talking a thousand miles per hour, old man Brother Jovel with his crazy eye and mumbling under his breath (nicest guy), Sister Delia always speaking english dancing and laughing, Sister Tessie preaching repentance to everyone and their dog on the streets as we walk, Brother Macasero always feeding us snacks. Everyone! I love them so much. Imma miss them!

Carmel is so platinum. After her baptism, she got kicked out of her house, and had a really hard time. but immediately, the ward took her under their wings and she now lives with all active members. And she knows exactly where those blessing came from.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3, 2013

The move to the new island was great. I was talking to everybody on the boats on my way here. Taught the first lesson to a Baptist preacher. Met a lot of cool people. One girl from Denmark traveling the world by herself, a gold-hunter from San Fransico. It was so cool telling them about the Church and just being friendly. My life is so cool!

Ok Negros (Oriental). It's one of the best places on the planet earth. We live right by the beach (mom and dad, I can hear the waves) and all the roads are sand and the people here are so nice. They speak a different form of Bisaya with new words, so I'm still getting used to it but I love it. They have like a tone when they talk, it sounds like theyre singing. haha my area is Zamboanguita, it's huge area-- rural/beachy/mountain/ricefields (google it!) and the members are amazing. The attendance at church is small, about 50, but I have such high hopes and faith for this area.

Last night, we were at a bakeshop ordering and a crazy old toothless man hobbled up to us and was chuckling at us and Elder Metusela looks at him and said "Ooo brotha, you need Jesus." hahaha I died.

Many miracles have happened already. The other day, we were tracting houses along the beach (literally walking on the sand) and found awesome return appointments. Then we kept walking for like an hour up into the mountains talking to everyone, and then we realized we were lost and VERY far from home and we hadn't seen a motor for a while, so we said a prayer and said "Please send us a motorcycle." within 2 minutes, a motor came driving by and stopped. (prayer answered) This woman told us that 10 years ago, she rented to a foreigner woman that was a Mormon and she went on and on about how kind she was and she remembered all her kids names...wow! That shows the influence we have as members. The power of kindness reaches far, even into the jungle mountains of Zamboanguita. haha we must always always be kind. Ok?

So things are so good! I'm looking forward to this area and the miracles and meeting the people. HOPE ON!!

We sing for all our investigators and while riding on tricycles. Pretty sure the entire municipality of Zambo now knows the song "I am a child of God"..

THURSDAY, JULY 25, 2013

We've tracted the biiiggest houses. We feel like we're on the TV show, The Buried life, because we're doing the most insane things, pushin' all fear behind us. One day we stood outside the gates not knowing what to expect, the guards let us in, and then the owner sees us and kicks us out and sends his dogs on us. rude... Needless to say, that was not a Filipino. Filipinos are much kinder about their rejection. We also tracted a small resort and the owners let us in and listened to us and they were like "come back anytime! swim in our pools and relax! no charge!" hahaha maybe in couple years! Then we met another man who works for United Nations and he had all his maids get us snacks and drinks...treat us like celebrities. We were speaking all in English and using all these big words; "wow sir! Gary is a great name for you because you're so gregarious! was that deliberate?!" haha. We have a lot of fun with that. Confidence can get you places.

We have had a ton of successes in finding investigators this week. One woman let us in and said "Oh you're Mormons??" and she runs and gets her daughter's backpack and pulls out a Book of

Mormon and said "I make her take this to school every day!" Haha, but she didn't know what it was, someone just gave it to her. So we explained it was a record of prophets in ancient America and reading it would bring her closer to God than anything else. We asked if we could come back and she was like "well of course you can! if I'm lookin' for the truth, who says you don't have it?" Those are just a few of the awesome experiences.

We're doing good here in Zambo. of course it's disappointing when people wont even give us the time of day. One man saw us walking up the street and he runs inside yelling, "NO! no! no! I have enough! I don't need anymore! I'm content with my religion!!"

Laborers In The Vineyard (July 30)

Traveling is so much fun, but exhausting. It was interesting to be back in Cebu and hearing the difference in language and everything.

Apo Adventure and More (August 7)

Taking a boat to the small, tropical Apo island and stepping onto the beach barefoot, with my shoes and socks in another hand. The water is crystal cleeeear blue. Put my socks and shoes back on and walk down a path into a small village, little filipino squint-smiles greeting you "Welcome to Apo!" and waving and little kids running to the windows of their school-classroom to say hello, a man playing the ukulele, let's me borrow it, I play and sing and a group of 20 kids gathers around us, we go on our way and meet new people, nicest on earth, walking through a clean little jungle village with vines hanging down, white cement houses and white sand beaches, introducing ourselves and teaching the gospel.

That's what i did today. All before noon. on a p-day. hahah we traveled to apo island, we were there for only an hour but we found 2 members of the Church there at different parts of the island, taught a lesson about the Restoration to a small family in the jungle and introduced ourselves to lots of people andd...you already know i took pictures. Guys, you shouldve seen the water there!! And the people were amazing. I want to go back. The restored gospel is going forth to "every isle of the sea"

It's Rainin' Investigators! (August 13)

Speakin of rain, it has rained every day this week. I've realized that every storm is called a "typhoon" here...even if it's a little rain. hahah aint no typhoons gonna stop the work! Something funny about filipinos: they absolutely haaaate getting wet. like cats. if it's raining, every single person on the street has an umbrella or hat on. If you get wet, you're supposed to take a shower immediately or else you'll get a bad fever. filipino filosofies. so we must look crazy out on the streets completely drenched with a big smile everywhere we go.

This is a great work. I love the philippines. I love the rain. I love the sun. I love the ocean. I love the fresh fish caught this morning. "it's the good life to be free"

The Missionary Boys are Coming (August 20)

They walked in and the WHOLE ward ran to greet them at the door. haha they were like celebrities, just walking through a crowd of outstretched hands, "Hi! Hi! hello! welcome to church! come sit come sit!" They put a whole new meaning on fellowshipping.

Other than that, I just realized again how much I love Filipinos. They are honestly the best people in the world. Just the nicest. Sometimes we get frustrated with people rejecting us, but I've been focusing just on the good, and it takes on a whole new perspective. Sometimes in life, when we're constantly around the same people every day all week, we start to notice their

weaknesses and flaws, but how much better would the world be if we only pointed out each other's strengths and virtues, ya know? Try that out. makes life better.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29, 2013

I can't explain my love for Negros. It's hard to leave, but if there's anywhere I wanna go, it's Cebu City.

Leaving Zambo is tough, I've loved this area; the mountains, the ocean, the beaches, but most of all, the members.

There's No One Here!!

so here, every big house has a big gate and this is how it usually goes:

ring doorbell...we hear sandals coming towards the gate...a little peek-hole opens abruptly and we see a big eye...

Them: WHAT?

Us: Hey! how you doin?! wow, you have a beautiful home!... We're missionaries and we'd like to share an awesome message that can bless yo--

Them: THERE'S NO ONE HERE.

Us: Well what about you?

nervous awkward silence, eye looks around...Peek-hole slams shut...person runs back inside.

Hahaha that's hard. It hurts. Especially mid-noon-hot-sweltering-philippine weather, I'm sunburnt.

Peace, Love, and Squatters (September 18, 2013)

We have so many meetings now with our mission president because we're preparing for a Peace Festival next week and city zone is helping run it. I'm excited. It's like an inter-faith festival where all religions will come to the town plaza park and set up booths and we're participating this year. It's gonna be so cool.

This week we got to go interview a couple for baptism and they live in the mountains in the middle of all these tiny cement houses. So I interviewed the old husband/ brother Fransico/ and we went out and sat on the top of their rusted tin roof cross legged and we were overlooking the mountain side stuffed with squatter slums. the moon was really big and Brother was holding a little oil lamp to light my scriptures.

It's all good up here in Apas Philippines. I love having the temple in our midst.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2013

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2013

we finished up the Peace Walk which was a huge success. We taught thousands of people and got tons of referrals. Because of the festival, our temple tour attendance tripled! It was amazing. We met so many elect people and I talked with other religions and priests and presidents and mayors.

One day I stopped a man in the plaza and had a ten minute conversation with him...in Spanish! He was from Spain and didn't know any English. *ahahah shout out to Senora Kiser!* Oh man it was so choppy and i had such a Cebuano accent. but it was awesome experience nevertheless. great peoples.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2013

This week we had: Transfers, General Conference, oh and a 7.2

EARTHQUAKE. WHAT??? You should have seen our neighbors screeaming and running outside. Our house mates hit the deck, and me and Elder Mingus were laughing, walking around trying to stay balanced. Everyone said it was the strongest one they've ever experienced.

Our week has been scattered with so many spiritual experiences, it's incredible. We'll be riding on a jeepney and have a prompting to get off and go visit someone and meet new people and teach them. Or we will be walking one direction and then just completely turn around and walk the opposite direction and we're led to these other people.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2013

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2013

The other day we stopped a guy named Kier on the street to talk with him. He said he had some friends that were Mormon and read part of the Book of Mormon said we could come visit him another day to teach. In our rush, we didn't get his address. A couple days later, we were about to end our night with dinner, but I had this feeling to go find Kier. We just went back to the area where we met him and started asking around if anyone knew him. Several attempts later, someone pointed us down a dark alley way where his house supposedly was. When we got to the end, a bunch of angry dogs were barking and snarling and we saw a man sitting, we tried to ask him but he was deaf and mute and was signing to us that he couldn't hear... Feeling helpless, I spelled "K-I-E-R" in the sign language i remember from 3rd grade...the man UNDERSTOOD. Also, this week we talked to a black man from Los Angeles. I think my inner-city "St.Louis" smeezy accent slipped out a little. He said "Aye, y'all like to party?" hahaha but we explained to him we were missionaries and he was so chill and willing to listen.

We had the awesome opportunity to help pack relief boxes to ship to Bohol where the earthquake hit. The damages are worse than i thought. But after church on Sunday, everyone gathered in the cultural hall and we did an assembly line tossing boxes of food and soap and toothpaste. I love how the Church reacts to do that. It was such a cool thing seeing everybody so happy in the Spirit of service.

SCREAM and RUN !!

We had a Halloween ward dinner and the theme was "Pioneers" so every one dressed up and Kristal (our investigator) came.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2013

There is a Catagory 5 (the worst) typhoon headed toward the islands this week. It should hit landfall by 8 p.m. tonight. We are praying for the safety and protection of the missionaries in the Philippines and the Filipino people they serve. We are tracking the storm on Typhoon2000.com

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2013

Our president gave us permission to email our families and tell you that we're alright after the typhoon. The wind was reeeally strong. There was a dog that flew into our apartment compound so now we have a new pet. his name is Yolanda. j/k!

We did a service project this morning picking up debris and trash n stuff. Everyone was smiling and happy at us. So grateful!

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2013

The typhoon was so much worse than we thought. I don't even know how describe what has happened in Tacloban. It's been an emotional past couple of days for me. I have seen the news and pictures and there are dead bodies everywhere-- in trees, electric lines, crushed under buildings. They show it on live television. Over 10,000 people have died.

We have been packing thousands of relief good truck fulls of sacks, I was on national tv last night... I'm so sore and exhausted but ready to keep going.

I really don't know what to say. Cebu is ok, we weren't hit bad at all. Thankfully, Mormon Helping Hands has given us amazing opportunities to serve, packing rice and canned foods and sugar, and packing truck-fulls of relief goods for Tacloban.

We're just now starting to realize how bad the storm was.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2013

My goodness, this will be one of the most memorable Christmases I've ever had. I have felt the holiday spirit more than ever. We looked for every opportunity to serve and help and make other people's day brighter and it just ended up making our season the brightest.

We bought food at the grocery for a bunch of people in the area and our cart was packed and while standing in the check out line, I heard two people behind me gossiping in a different language-- "Those rich foreigners just buy whatever they want, just anytime, living a comfortable lifestyle..." Then I turned to them and told them to put their food with mine, and we paid for all of their groceries, and said "Merry Christmas!" They were giddy and laughing nervously and thanking us profusely. Haha the best.

Then we went out and passed out baskets of oranges and apples and ham and soft drinks. I wish you could have seen their faces. One woman just looked up to the sky and said "thank you! thank you!" She understood where it really came from.

Last night, Christmas night, we took our Ukulele out and stood on a busy corner and caroled Christmas hymns, and we had so many people stop and take pictures. Then we walked through the neighborhoods and people came out of their homes, mothers with babies on hip, and dads in their pajamas, smiling and singing along. We handed out candy to everyone walking by, oh man I'll never forget it.

SOUTH AFRICA, JOHANNESBURG

Monday, December 2, 2013

Wow this week was full of celebration! It was a way fun week but it was also full of even more great missionary work! I guess I'll start off by talking about Thanksgiving.

So all during the day Sister Gillis and Sister Clifford went out and did the teaching and tracting for the day. I stayed back and helped Sister Abraham get everything ready. I never realized how much work a Thanksgiving dinner really is! It took all day! And we even tried to simplify! Once everything was ready we all came together to eat. None of us got to celebrate Halloween so we all dressed up for Thanksgiving instead. It was a lot of fun. Very silly but it made it memorable for sure. Sister Abraham challenged us all to think of something each hour of the day that we

were thankful for. Then at dinner we all went around and shared. It was a really cool assignment. It really made you stop and think all throughout the day about the little things to be thankful for. I almost always remember to be thankful for the big blessings but a lot of the times I forget to be thankful for the little things. I really enjoyed doing it. The dinner was great too and afterward we all just hung out and played games. The Elders played elbow and knee Twister. Have you ever heard of it? Well its hilarious just in case you were wondering. all around it was just a really great day.

The other celebration was the Branch Christmas party. That was a lot of fun too. And one of our investigators that we just started teaching came and LOVED it! It was so exciting! Then she came to church on Sunday!!! Anyways, yea it was really great. The Elders braaied (grilled) a lot of meat and everyone from the branch brought side dishes. I love South African food. I've been fed more in the two weeks I've been here than in all my time in Bots. Elder Brown Dressed up as Santa and mostly everyone just had fun spending time with each other, singing hymns, and eating. The members here are amazing. I already love it here.

I guess that was the only celebration we did this week. The rest of the week was great too. We volunteered at a retirement home on Friday which was awesome. I love old people. They make me so happy. They just have so many great stories! We got to help serve their tea and then we just sat and talked with them for a while. Its amazing to see how much they light up when they have visitors.

I am so happy here. I miss Botswana but honestly I don't want to go back. Its been the same each time I left an area. I miss it like crazy but wherever I am at the moment becomes home. I still think Monarch is my favorite area and I would LOVE to go back and visit but Mafikeng is my home now. I'm making the most of it. We are working hard, we are being obedient, and we are seeing the blessings from that. It doesn't hurt that its been raining almost every day and we go running every morning. The little things like that help keep life happy!

Eating a traditional South African dish... Kota.

Close up of the Kota. It consists of a quarter of a loaf of bread cut in half and made into a sandwich. In the sandwich is chips (a.k.a. french fries), an egg, a hamburger patty, 2 hot dogs, a sausage, archar (pickled mango), lettuce, cheese, polony (like bologna but even more processed), and special kota sauce. Basically a heart attack on bread. It was surprisingly yummy. Please be impressed. I ate the whole thing

Branch Christmas Party! Elder Brown dressed up as Santa. It was a HUGE hit.

Monday, December 9, 2013

Remember how last week I told you about going to the retirement home and how great it was? Well we go there a lot. A few times a week at least. The people there love us so much and I love them too! They have just adopted us right in to their family. Sometimes we go and just visit, sometimes we do chair yoga with them, sometimes we help serve them their afternoon tea. But this week we got to go and do a Christmas music sing-a-long! It was so much fun! A lot of them are too old to be able to sing but those who could, did. And those who couldn't just listened. Elder Butcher played the piano for us and then me and Sister Gillis and Sister Clifford took turns conducting. It was so incredible. They all loved it so much. You could tell by looking at their

faces as we were singing that it really lifted their spirits. Then Elder Brown dressed up as Santa again and they all took photos with him. The whole activity is one of my favorite things I have done on mission so far. The residents there have become like my grandmas. They call us their kids and we call them grandma. I am just in love with that place!!!

We found a lot of them but a lot of them weren't interested in learning more about the church. One of the names on the list had no phone number. It was just a man's name and for his address it said "Look for a big house with shiny cars on the way to the game reserve" I wish I was kidding... But by a miracle, we actually found the house! We decided to just try it out. So we headed towards the game reserve (which is in our area. How cool is that? we have a game reserve in our area!) We saw a few big houses but none that really stood out. Until we were almost there. There was a HUGE house with a HUGE gate. The garage was open and there were 2 Bentleys inside. parked outside were 3 other super nice, super shiny cars. Turns out it was the right house! The family wasn't interested anymore but it was still amazing that we were able to find the house.

But Sister Anderson and Sister Twongeirwe also lost their residency in Botswana so they are coming to Mafikeng! I'm excited to have them here.

p.s. all the awesome animal pictures are from today. This morning we went on a game drive. It was incredible. We saw a TON of animals and the weather was perfect. I wish my camera was able to capture it better. Everyone should be able to see the beauty of Africa at least once in their lives.

Merry Christmas from Africa!.... yes those are donkeys!

Zebras! We saw a ton but these were the closest.

Rhinos! The momma and her baby. We got super close to these too.

Giraffe family!!! The baby was adorable. It was amazing-they always stuck together.

Tuesday, December 17, 2013

I just want to start off by apologizing that I wasn't able to email you yesterday. As you probably already know, Nelson Mandela passed away last week. His funeral was on Sunday and then yesterday was kind of like a day of mourning. Everything was closed in respect of Mandela's passing.

That's not what made the week weird though. What made it weird was all the random medical issues! It all started on Wednesday. We were going to pick up a member so she could go teaching with us. She has 8 dogs. I have gotten a lot better about dogs since coming on mission. I still don't particularly love them but I'm ok with them. Well these dogs were smallish but they were circling me very suspiciously the whole time we were at the member's door. All of a sudden the biggest one went crazy. It charged at me and started chewing on my leg. Then a couple of the others thought it looked like fun so they joined. My companions literally had to pull me away while the member got the dogs. By some miracle none of them broke the skin. But my leg was super swollen and scratched up and bruised. It hurt. A lot. So we had to cancel our lesson so we could go home and I could take care of my leg. That pretty much took up an entire afternoon. It was crazy. But I can officially say I have been bit by a dog on mission! I'm a real

missionary now! (p.s. Im completely ok now. I still have a pretty nasty bruise wrapped around my whole leg but nothing I can't handle)

Yesterday was fun even though we weren't able to email. Some members took us to a dam just outside of town. We didn't actually even see the dam. It was basically just a lake. It was so much fun. It was nice to just be outside having fun with the other missionaries. I got to wear a Zulu headband, we got to skip rocks, we saw some donkeys. Nothing overly exciting but just lots of fun.

We also decorated our christmas tree this week! Its the best we could do with the circumstances and our budget but its wonderful. The elders were great and went and got it for us. Then we spent an evening stringing popcorn and paper chains. It turned out great. Its amazing how different it feels being away from home but how it can still be home here.

This guy was at the dam catching fish and cleaning them right there on the shore. I was so proud of myself! I watched and I didn't get sick!

Monday, December 23, 2013
Africa has the best sunsets!

Monday, December 30, 2013

Well for the sake of anyone reading this who I wasn't able to talk to on Christmas, I'll tell you about Christmas! It really was one of the best Christmases ever even though I was away from home. On Christmas eve we spent the day going around and caroling at a private hospital in town. We went to almost every single patient and sang and gave out little chocolates. It was really cool to see them light up as we came by. I think we might have set a record for making people cry. It was really great. Then for the rest of the day we mostly just helped out Sister Abraham. For dinner we joined in Elder and Sister Abraham's family tradition and had hamburgers and chocolate milkshakes. Then all the sisters had a sleepover in the living room at our flat and watched 17 Miracles and sang Christmas songs together. It was a lot of fun and it felt like family.

Then on Christmas morning all the missionaries went over to the Abraham's house and did a gift exchange. Each person got 1 gift that was collectively from all the other missionaries. They got me some paints and a canvas which I am super excited to use. Then we spent the rest of the day going around to less actives and other members who were alone for Christmas. Surprisingly enough, I think we broke our Christmas eve record for making people cry! People were so grateful to have us come. And that's what we did literally all day. Just went caroling to members of the branch. I loved it so much. It was completely focused on others and it really helped us all to remember the real reason for the holiday. Something pretty cool happened for lunch though. So a few days before, someone who works at a pizza place met the other sisters and requested that on Christmas we come and carol at the place where she works. So we did! All the sisters went and sang at this pizza place in town. By the end of it there was a crowd of probably 25+ people all gathered around watching and listening. It was pretty cool. The manager of the restaurant loved it so much he decided that he wants to be a member of our church! " From this day on I don't want to go to any other church except this one!" Then he gave us 2 free pizzas. We

found a ton of people who are now interested in learning about the gospel just because of that! Incredible huh?!

Since then literally nothing has happened though. Sister Clifford and I have actually been really sick so we have been on pretty strict bed rest. I don't know what it is but Africa seems to bring out the worst in my health. I get sick way too often here. This time its just been really really bad headaches and fatigue. We are going in to see a doctor tomorrow so hopefully it'll all be fine soon!

Monday, January 6, 2014

Most of this week I spent down. I was sick again. I think I mentioned it in last week's email. It got pretty bad near the middle of the week but I am doing a lot better now. Tons actually. I actually feel like myself again! Which is nice after a long time of not feeling like myself. I don't know why I get sick so much here. Its really frustrating. But we went to the doctor and he gave me some tips that I am going to try that I hope will help me stay healthy.

For new years we didn't do anything super exciting or anything but it was still good. We weren't allowed to tract and I was too sick to really do much else but we had a really good zone meeting in the morning. Then in the evening all the missionaries had dinner together. It was nice to just be with them. Then from then till midnight all the sisters laid outside in our front yard with blankets and we watched the stars and the fireworks from the neighbors. It was a good way to welcome the new year! Its crazy to think that its 2014! AAhh!

Monday, January 13, 2014

Most of this week was spent doing 2 things: Service and tracting. We have done so many people's lawns in the past week we are thinking about making it a business. Its been great to help the members and they have really really appreciated the help. Plus its been nice to take a bit of a break from the proselyting missionary work.

But mostly we have been tracting and tracting and tracting some more. With minimal success. Its a bit discouraging at times but its ok. We have met a lot of really really friendly people but nobody is interested! It definitely makes me appreciate Bots a lot more. There, everyone and their dog would let us in. Here, nobody, especially the dogs, will let us teach them.

So Nuku (the member) was a great sport and she came tracting with us! We did a whole street and only 1 person was interested so were trying to figure out where to go next. Nuku told us she had a few friends who stayed nearby so for the rest of the afternoon she showed us where every single one of her friends who live in our area stay and she introduced us to them! It was incredible! She was fearless! I wish I had the courage to do that in high school! At one point we drove past a big group of guys playing soccer. She recognized a few of them from her class so we pulled over went and talked to them. They were willing to stop their game to listen to us! It was amazing! She is 16 years old and she is already more of a missionary than I ever was back home. I learned a lot from her in the few hours we were together.

Monday, January 20, 2014

After district meeting one of the elders told me and Sister Twongeirwe that we had to leave right then to go to the border of SA and Bots. We were going to try and get us back in to Bots and

hopefully start our residency papers again! I was so excited. Apparently it worked with one of the other Elders. The granted him 65 extra days in Bots. So we drove all the way to the border, got through the SA side just fine and we were at the Bots side. We tried to request for 80 days in the country but we were willing to get fewer. Much to our dismay, though, they only gave us 4. Four days and thats it. So we decided to just go back to SA. We crossed the border and went up to a town just north of the border and met up with some missionaries there for a few minutes but then we just went back to SA. It was awesome to be back in Bots for a few minutes but sad that it couldnt be for longer. So now Im back in Mafikeng with not a high likelihood of going back to Botswana in the near future.

On the way back though, I was almost in a really really bad car accident. I was driving and we were going down a dirt road. The elders were in front of us in a baakie (truck). They hit a bump but they were fine. I hit the bump and our dinky little car didnt handle it well. Once our back tires got off the bump we started skidding like we were on ice sort of. I lost control of the car for about the length of 1/2 a football field. Our car was spinning and going crazy. I legitimately thought I was going to die. At one point the car started to tip over. But right as we were about to start rolling, both Sister Two and I (we were the only ones in the car) both literally felt someone catch the car and lift it back into place. Immediately I had control of the car again. It was the biggest miracle. Even the Elders said that they were watching out of their rear mirrors and it made no sense how we got out of that. We pulled over and made sure everyone was ok and we were. We were both completely fine and the car was fine. But that night I couldnt sleep. The whole thing kept playing over and over in my mind.

The next day was Saturday. There was a Relief Society enrichment meeting that was amazing! We had a lunch and learned about eating healthy. There were 2 investigators there and 2 less active members who we have been working with! I guess I dont really know what else to say about it but it was just really exciting to have so many people there.

Monday, January 27, 2014

It might be the last time I can say that so I have to use it as much as I can! I already talked to you mom and dad but for anyone else- Tomorrow I am leaving for the Zambia Lusaka mission! On Friday I got a call from my mission president telling me that residency has gotten really bad so another group has to leave the mission. (In the past few weeks we have already lost like 20 other missionaries) So I am one of them for this round. I am not officially reassigned to the Zambia mission but I am just being transferred there for what they call "visa waiting". Its kind of like what happens to people right at the beginning of their missions if they can't get a visa in time. But for me, they didn't promise that I'll be coming back to this mission. They told us that they would try but also that we need to make sure we work our hardest in the new mission and not just wait around to come back.

The rest of this past week was really good too. It seems like forever ago but I'll tell you about it anyway. There were a few pretty funny moments. Hopefully they are funny to you too. First of all, as you know, the sisters in Mafikeng have to be escorted a lot. This week we were going to a members house following the elders. I was in the car with Sister Gillis and we were talking and laughing and having a grand old time. All of a sudden we got a call from the elders who were escorting us. "Where are you guys?? We are so sorry we lost you! Pull over and we will come find you! We are so sorry we lost you!" ... Sister Gillis and I were so confused. We thought we were still right behind them! We weren't. Turns out we had been following the wrong car for like

3 minutes. It was the exact kind of car as the elders have! But they probably thought we were pretty creepy. Luckily the elders found us really quickly and it all worked out fine. But it was so funny.

Another funny moment was at u-nite. U-nite is kind of like FHE but more for the community. So all the sisters got there early and we were waiting for people to arrive. The first person to show up (other than the member who's house we were meeting at) was Brother Max. He is a member in Mafikeng. He is also a semi-professional rapper. While we were waiting for others to show up we decided to sing some hymns. We asked Brother Max what his favorite is. He chose Hymn 340. (no he is not American). He then proceeded to tell us that he had already sang that hymn like a hundred times that day and he had perfected his rap of it. We asked him if he would perform it for us and he oh so graciously agreed. I now have a video of a South African man rapping the Star Spangled Banner. Yea. Its awesome.

Ok one more funny for you. So I can't remember if I already told you this but in Mafikeng we have an alarm system in our house. When we turn it on there are motion sensors inside the house that will set the alarm off if anything moves in the house. So we set it to leave but before we even made it to the car the alarm went off. So we ran back and turned it off. We accidentally left a window open and the wind blew the curtains and it set it off. We turned the alarm off but the alarm company had already been informed so they sent their guard. Its an armed response company so a couple minutes later a tall guy with a huge gun showed up at our house. "I'm looking for the church of God. Is everything ok here?". It probably shouldn't have been but it was just so funny to hear those words come out of his mouth with his big gun! We got a pretty big kick out of it.

We also had some really amazing moments this week. On Saturday Sister Anderson, Sister Clifford and I were running some errands. I just needed to buy a few things before I left for Zambia. We were walking out of the grocery store and we noticed that a man had been following us for a little while. I started to get a bit nervous. We started to walk a little faster and headed to the car. I guess he realized that he had worried us because he called after us "Wait! Can I have a Book of Mormon?" That's definitely not what we expected to hear. At all. We all turned around and just stared at him. We must have looked really really confused cause he repeated himself a little slower. Sister Clifford was the first to snap out of it. "Of course!!" she said. As we talked to him we found out that he was baptized in Johannesburg when he was a teenager but he moved to Mafikeng about 6 years ago and he didn't know there was a church here. He is married to a non member but he wants to bring her to church. He apologized for scaring us and told us that he had never seen Sisters before so he had followed us to make sure we were really from the right church. He promised to come to church! I'm sad I am leaving. It would have been cool to see if he came!

Tuesday, January 28, 2014

Hello!! I just wanted to let you know that I made it safely to Zambia! Sister Veal and I left Botswana early this morning and flew to Johannesburg. We had a 3 hour layover at the airport there and then we flew to Lusaka. The mission president and his wife picked us up and we just got to the mission office! So we get to email you and tell you that we are here. It is soo green

here I can't even believe it. After coming from Botswana which is just brown as far as you can see its way different here. I love it already.

Monday, February 3, 2014

I never thought I'd be able to say that! But its pretty exciting. I'm being able to see a lot more of Africa than I ever thought I would! Its a lot different here than in South Africa and Botswana. It was a desert there but now it rains every single day. In relief Society yesterday we were talking about how all of our lives have seasons. We compared it to the seasons here. But they only have 3 seasons in Zambia. The cold season from May-July, the hot season from August-October, and the rainy season from November- April. Which makes things interesting because we live on a dirt road and we don't have a car. So every day its a game to try and see if we can make it down the street without getting stuck in the mud. But it really does make it so green here! Every day when we are walking around I just can't believe it! Its beautiful. But it also means there are a lot of mosquitos. I have to sleep under a mosquito net at night. They aren't as bad in the day time but as soon as it starts to get dark they start to bite. But its ok because we have to be in by dark for safety anyway!

Other than just the physical differences, the mission is pretty different too. There are a LOT more native African missionaries. In fact, me being companions with Sister Veia is rare. Usually they don't have 2 Americans together. I live in a flat with 3 Americans(including myself), a sister from Zimbabwe, and a sister from Madagascar! Oh and we live across the road from a "Jesus Worship Centre" There is gospel music blaring pretty much all the time. Its pretty great. Then just a lot of little technical things about how the mission is run are different. I love it though. I actually think it would be really hard to go back to Botswana.

The area Sister Veia and I are working is pretty similar to the area I was working in South Africa. Lots of gates and fences. I feel like South Africa was really good preparation for me to be serving here actually.

So its been a lot of walking around this week. Not too much excitement. Walking really helps you learn the area faster though! In a car, if you take a wrong turn you just u-turn and you are back on track! When you are walking, it takes a long time to get back on track so you make sure you go the right way. But its also fun to be able to talk to people on the way. When you are driving you miss a lot of contacting opportunities! I have met so many people this past week! Its great! Zambians are so so nice. In Botswana I felt like the reason a lot of people were nice to me was just because I was foreign. Which was fine! But here I feel like people are just genuinely nice just for the sake of being nice.

Monday, February 10, 2014

1. Brian. On Friday Sister Veia and I were walking to a members house. We had been there once before but for some reason neither of us could remember which street we were supposed to turn down. We got to a street that looked like it might be right and both of us felt like it was where we were supposed to go. So we turned and started walking. There was bad traffic so all the cars on the road were stopped. All of a sudden we could faintly hear the hymn "Come Come Ye Saints" playing. We couldn't figure out where it was coming from though! So we just kept walking. As we did it got louder and louder. Finally we figured out where it was coming from. A guy sitting

in the traffic was blasting it from his car. Full volume. It was awesome! So we stopped at the car and talked to the guy. His name was Brian. He told us that he loved the Mormon Tabernacle choir. "Well... We are the Mormons!" we said! The traffic started moving so we didn't get to talk to him more after that but we gave him a pass along card with our number on it and a restoration pamphlet. Who knows what will come of it but it was pretty darn cool!

Football (soccer) on P-day!

Sister Rakotonindriana made us some traditional food from Madagascar. I liked the pap and the green stuff. The little fish things were not my favorite...

We had a braai at a game drive in Mafikeng. We didnt see many animals but it was fun.

Monday, February 17, 2014

We had a few really funny moments this week too. As we were walking to a lesson one day we could hear a guy behind us start to yell "Madame! Madame!" (thats what people call us a lot) His speech was kind of slurred so we thought he was drunk so we just ignored him. Then he started walking faster to catch up. Still yelling "Madame! Wait! Madame" We kept ignoring him because usually drunk men=trouble. But he caught up pretty quickly so we turned around to see what he wanted. In his hands was this dirty, nasty looking turtle. "Madame!! I am selling this turtle! I know you need a turtle! Madame! Please buy this turtle!" We politely declined the offer while holding back laughter. We are pretty sure he just found that on the side of the road and he wanted to make a little extra money. It was a lovely experience.

Here's another funny. We were walking home at the end of the day and we were both really tired. But as we walked by a house I felt like we needed to knock. I have learned to never ignore promptings so we knocked. Well we rang the call box on the outside of the gate actually. We couldnt even see the house. There was no answer so we started to walk away. Right as we did the gate opened! An older man was walking towards us with this look of complete confusion on his face. We said hello but before we even had a chance to introduce ourselves he just said "...ok..." and shut the gate. It was just so funny! I am probably not describing it very well and maybe you had to have been there but I promise, it was funny. We figured Heavenly Father knew that we had a long day so He gave me that prompting so we could have a good laugh

This week there was also a HUGE rain storm. Which normally is fine! But as you know, we are walking. Which made things interesting. Lets just say that we walked through streets that had turned into rivers, there was so much rain our umbrellas leaked, and I was drenched to the bone. It definitely made for an adventure! Luckily I love the rain.

Monday, February 24, 2014

To start off thoughdrumroll..... I'm training again!!! Sister Veia and I are co-training a sister who just got here from the MTC. Her name is Sister Hirwa. She was born in Rwanda but she grew up in South Africa. I love her so much already. She is really powerful. She is amazing at really listening to what people say and then tying in her response to the gospel. She is very confident and very excited to be working. And she sings all the time. Its great.

Another cool moment we had was with some little girls we are teaching. Remember the picture I sent of the girls making the mud phones? Well we go over to their house and read Book of Mormon stories with them a couple times a week. Matilda is 9 and Yvette is 8 but they couldn't read. So we have been having them read with us. What we do is one of us will read a line and we

have them follow along and repeat it back. We have only been doing this for a couple weeks but they are already learning so fast! Its amazing! They are already able to read almost all of the small words like "the, and, this, them, he, what...etc." just by sight and they are able to sound out a lot of bigger words. We still have to prompt them a lot but they are to the point where instead of us reading and they repeat, they are reading and we are just helping with big words! Its been so cool to see their progress.

I had a pretty funny thing happen to me too. It probably shouldn't have been funny but I couldn't keep myself from laughing. So on Wednesday we went to a funeral for a member in another branch. I didn't know who he was but they asked us to come to show support. So we just sat in the back to let people who actually knew him be close. About half way through the service a really drunk man came in and sat right in front of us. About every 30 seconds he turned around and gave us a really weird look. At one point I dropped the pen I was holding so I bent down to get it but I couldn't find where it went so I was leaned over for a little while. It just so happened that while I was down the man turned around again. He saw that I was leaning over and he semi-yelled "What are you doing?? Are you sleeping? Don't you know that this is a funeral?? You don't sleep at funerals! Are you not Christian???" Then he gave us one more odd look and he stormed out. Lets just say that it was slightly more than a little bit disruptive and I felt quite embarrassed. But it was also really quite hilarious. I just felt really bad that it happened at a funeral...awkward.

Monday, March 3, 2014

This morning we had a zone activity and we didn't get back till late. We went to a place called Kalimba farms. Its a reptile park. So we got to go around and see a bunch of snakes and crocodiles and snakes and stuff. I got to hold a 9 foot python! And we saw a crocodile that was 21 feet long!! (I didn't hold that one) We also got to see them feel the crocodiles. It was pretty awesome.

So one good thing for the week is that immigration went well! I was approved to stay in Zambia till the end of mission. So I for sure won't get sent to another mission! I might still go back to Bots but I'm safe in this mission if not.

We had another pretty cool finding experience this week too. So we were walking to an appointment and we were running a little late because it was raining really hard. We needed to cross a road to get to the road we needed to take. Its usually a really quiet street and we have no trouble crossing. But for some reason that day it was so busy! Car after car kept coming and we had no chance to cross! I'm not exaggerating- 10 minutes went by without a single break in the line of cars and there is no other way to get to the street we needed to go to. Finally a car stopped to let us by. We thanked him profusely and quickly crossed. So we kept going and a little ways down the road we saw the guy who let us through parked on the side of the road. We were still late but we decided to talk to him.

Monday, March 10, 2014

that the gospel really can bless him. He stays for more of the lessons now and he asks great questions. They didn't make it to church this week because George had to go to South Africa again. But They are still progressing well. We went over to their house and did slashing this week. We brought the whole district and we were able to get a lot done. Their front ditch had

grass that was knee high or longer and we cut it all and trimmed all the bushes. I wish I would have taken a before and after photo.

We also were able to teach another pretty awesome person this week. He is a history professor. He has spent the last 40 years traveling the world, teaching in different universities. Its pretty amazing! Right now he is working on writing 2 books. One is about the history of the struggle for freedom in each of the over 60 African countries. The other one is and encyclopedia about the history of Zambia.

So I'm not sure if there are just a lot more weird things that happen here in Zambia or if I just notice them more because I walk everywhere here but we saw a lot of odd things while going around this week. For example: On our way home a couple days ago a white guy (one of the only ones I have seen in Lusaka) sprinted past us like he was running from a herd of angry elephants. He was wearing women's sunglasses and the shortest shorts I have ever seen on a man. And he was holding a bright yellow duffle bag. Despite many valiant attempts we could not figure out what the heck was going on. But earlier that day while we were walking down a main road, 4 cars drove by. All of them were honking obnoxiously. And hanging out of all the windows were men holding huge guns and shouting in Nyanja. It was a little scary. We are hoping the two incidents are unrelated.

And here is another example: The sisters we live with came home the other day and told us that there was a riot at the police station in their area. I thought that maybe there was some corrupt police something or maybe a prisoner escaped or you know something else scary. But that was not the case at all! Apparently a little girl had seen a mermaid in her toilet. So her parents called the police to come check it out. But after further investigation, the mermaid wasn't found. So the little girl's parents got angry at the police because they thought that the police actually stole the mermaid and were holding it hostage at the police station. So the mom gathered all her friends and neighbors and stormed off to the station to free the captive toilet mermaid. I sincerely wish I was kidding about this. There was literally a riot over a toilet mermaid.

We went to an elephant orphanage a couple p-days ago. It was pretty adorable.

The smallest one kept sucking on the older ones' ears. Apparently its a way he copes with the loss of his mom. And the older ones let him do that to comfort him. Adorable huh?

Slashing. The most ineffective way of cutting grass ever invented. But for some reason Zambia has decided to make it the primary way of cutting grass. But its ok! If you get enough missionaries doing it at the same time, you can finish a yard in a few hours!

Monday, March 17, 2014

Dumela once again!

I have been pretty good at saying muli bwanji when I talk to people here but for some reason this week, dumela kept coming out! I guess that makes sense after saying dumela to so many people every day for 9 months.

Another reason it went fast was because we actually got fed this week! I haven't been fed my members since we got here but this week we got fed twice! The Relief society president brought us to her house on saturday morning and made us a full blown out breakfast. Im talking bacon, eggs, porridge, juice, tea, cereal, fruit... pretty much just anything you would ever want for

breakfast. It was so yummy. And its definitely the best breakfast Ive had for almost a year. Normally we just eat cereal or toast for breakfast. And then we were able to help her out with a few things she's been struggling with in relief society.

A few funny things happened this week, too. People have started selling these things here called Freezits. They are little ice pop things. They sell them for super cheap just on the streets. Well when people write the signs to advertise them, sometimes they put an unfortunately placed space in the word. So a lot of the time they are trying to get me to come get free zits. "Eew, no one would buy it!" (Emma, name that movie!) Yea. Its super funny and pretty gross.

Thursday, March 27, 2014

On Friday we did more slashing for Michelo and George. They are still doing great. But they haven't come to church the past couple weeks. It was for funerals for a couple of them but this week they were both home and they still didn't come so that was sad. We are seeing them tonight so hopeful we will find out what happened.

Another frustrating thing from this week was that another guy we were teaching dropped us. He was actually on date to be baptized next month. But for a few different reasons we haven't been able to see him for about two weeks. When we saw him this week he gave his Book of Mormon back and told us he didn't want to read it anymore. He said that it was too confusing and that he only wanted to use the Bible. We think he is being taught by people from a different church, too. He had a lot of weird questions and most of them were from pamphlets from a different church. He said he'd call us if he wants us to come back. So we will see what happens.

Sad news though: I missed church for the first time on mission yesterday. I got really bad food poisoning so we weren't able to go. It was no fun at all. I'm totally better now. It was just a 24 hour thing. But you dont realize how much you depend on something till you miss it!

Monday, March 31, 2014

We are also teaching a great man named Mr. Tembo. He is a security guard for a house in the area. We have been teaching him for a few weeks now. He's doing really well. He loves the teachings and knows the Church and the Book of Mormon is true. But he works on Sunday so he can't come to church yet. We are working on it.

When Zambians speak English, most of the time they switch the L and the R sound. So fries are flies and my name is sister Gehling. This sign is near my flat. Can you guess what its trying to say? Yup... they were trying to say "No Road" Lovely huh?

Monday, April 7, 2014

Dumeli Bwanji!!

Because Sister Vea and I have been having a hard time switching from Setswana to Nyanja, We decided to combine Dumela and Muli Bwanji to make Dumeli Bwanji! Its been working out quite nicely.

One of the people we were able to teach was Jonathan. He is the one who found out pass along card at the library and stopped us while we were walking. He is still doing really well.

He has great questions and he is eager to learn. He even came to church on sunday and loved it! We found out though that he doesn't actually live in our area so we have to hand him over to other missionaries in a different branch. Sometimes its hard to remember that its all the Lord's work so in the end it doesn't matter who teaches.

Another person we taught was Boney. He works for the office of the president of Zambia which is pretty awesome. He also found us in a miraculous way. A couple weeks ago a man stopped us on the side of the road and asked us for money for transportation to the hospital. As missionaries we aren't allowed to give people money but we gave him a pamphlet and wished him luck. Well the man then went looking around for other people to give him money. Boney was getting into his car as the man came up to him. Boney offered him a ride to the bus station and on the way the man gave boney the pamphlet we had given him. Boney went home and read it and thought it was great. He called us and asked us if he could come to the church! So on Saturday we met him at the chapel, gave him a tour and taught him about the Restoration of the gospel. He loved it and he could recognize the Spirit that was there. Right now he is a very active member of his church, but I think there is definite potential for him to be a very strong member of the church.

Our flat is the biggest in the mission and it is right in Lusaka so whenever sisters are just passing through for whatever reason, they stay with us. I don't think there has been a single week since I have been in Zambia where we didn't have at least one person stay at our house. Its fun but its always nice to be back to normal when they leave again.

A funny thing from the week happened yesterday. Last night it was my turn to cook dinner so I was making rice and morogo and stew. Right as I put the meat in the stew, the power went off. It was fast Sunday so we were all hungry anyways so it was very sad. We decided to play Uno while we waited and prayed that the power came back on. Luckily it did so I continued dinner. Then right as it was about to finish cooking, the power went off again! It was off for another 15 minutes and came back on so we finally ate. The whole thing was pretty funny. It might be one of those things where you would have had to be there but trust me, it was humorous.

Monday, April 14, 2014

The week started off with us teaching a nice little family. They don't speak too much English but they are looking for the truth so I am excited to see how they progress. Then on Wednesday we taught two sisters who are just adorable. They are YSA age and they are so great. Their names are Sherrifah and Prudence.

Funny story with them, though. So we were seeing them at noon and we had appointments for the rest of the day so we weren't going to be able to get lunch after we saw them. So we decided to eat before we went over. We went to this place called Hungry Lion for lunch. Its kind of like KFC. So by the time we went to their house we were really full. So we taught them and it was good and everything. then right after we prayed, Sherrifah brought us each a HUGE plate of food. It was rice and stew. It was so yummy but I was soooooo full. I was able to eat most of it but towards the end, I took a bite and I felt it start to come back up. At that point I decided to stop. The whole thing was pretty funny.

We found this at Matilda's house. It says "God's son goes to the children's family to love his children"

Emma, this is for you... popcorn in Africa!
Its been super cold and rainy lately!

Monday, April 21, 2014

Ok so Easter was yesterday but I didn't say it last week. Easter for me was good. It wasn't too different from a normal day though. We had a really good relief society lesson about the

Atonement and we sang the Easter Hymns but that was about it. We just spent the rest of the day doing what we do! Spreading the word! But I think that's probably the best way to celebrate anyway. But the Lord sure did wish us a happy Easter. A family we are teaching came to church and a less active we have been working with came to church for the first time since we got here! So that was pretty exciting.

And today we are going out to eat at a place that is kind of like Denny's. On Friday we taught the Zulu family again. They are the ones I told you about last week and the ones who came to church! I like them a lot. They are a really sweet family.

Then Easter was great just like I said. In fact, it was one of the best days of mission so far.

Largely because of Atkins. A few weeks ago we tracted in to the place where he works. He is a body guard for a government official or something like that.

A funny moment from the week/month/entire time that I've been in Zambia. I told you about the people here switching their R's and L's right? Well its rubbed off on me. I don't even mean to do it! But I keep accidentally closing my prayers in the name of Jesus Clist and and testifying that the knowredge of the gospel will bress people's lives. Its not all the time! But enough that its bad. I'm going to sound so weird by the time I go home...

p.s. there is a TV in the email shop playing sports news. First there was a report about the Houston Rockets and then they went on to a special about the Chelsea soccer team. Its been quite distracting.

Monday, April 28, 2014

I want to start off by saying that outside of the email shop right now there is some sort of celebration going on. I have no idea what it is for. But there are about 10 traditional dancers, a couple guys with awesome drums, and dancing all around them, is a man in a gorilla suit. It is quite a sight to behold.

We passed a shop where John was standing. He told us that when we passed, something inside him made him turn around. So he saw us. But we didn't see him. The member wasn't there so we walked back down the street. When we passed John again he stopped us. He told us that he noticed something special about us and he felt like we had a book that he needed to read. So we gave him a pamphlet and got his number. We set an appointment but he went out of town to go see his kids. We ran into him a few times after that when he was randomly back in town.

We finally taught him on Tuesday! During the lesson we found out that he is a member of the Bemba royal family (Bembas are the 2nd largest tribe in Zambia) He is actually the rightful heir to the throne to be the chief be he turned it down so he could live a normal life. He has a medical degree and is one of the only people in Zambia licensed to work those machines that scan people's brains. And he is currently working on getting a theology degree and a psychology degree. He is a member of a church that knows about the Book of Mormon. One of their founders loved and studied from the Book of Mormon but they only had one copy. The entire church thinks that the Book of Mormon is something that can't be found anywhere. His theology professor told the whole class that anyone who finds a copy of the Book of Mormon is a very lucky person.

Rainy and cold in Zambia.

Quite possibly the only sunflower in all of Lusaka

Monday, May 5, 2014

Well I have to say this has been one of the weirdest weeks of mission so far. I'll start off by telling you about the two less-than-awesome phone calls I received.

The first one was from the police station. The phone rang and it wasn't a number we had saved but that happens all the time. So I picked up and it was the police department asking if we knew a Joefrey Makasa (who was one of our investigators). At first I thought he was calling us for bail money or something. But then he said that regretfully, Joefrey was found deceased. He was found in a "decomposed state" in a ditch about 30 minutes from his house. He had been stabbed. They got our number from the inside of the Book of Mormon that was found with his body and they were calling us to see if we knew any of his family members. Unfortunately we didn't. It was the last thing I expected to hear. It was probably the worst phone call I have ever received. But Joefrey was a really great guy. He had a lot of potential. I'm sure he is being taught the discussions on the other side. Its just sad that he had to get there that way.

The second phone call was not quite so bad as that one. It was more just incredibly awkward. It was a phone call from one of our other investigators. Actually he isn't even ours anymore. He didn't live in our area so we referred him to the elders. Anyways, he called a couple nights ago. I picked up the phone and he started asking me weird questions like how old I was and why we referred him to the other elders and how long I'd be in Zambia. So I asked him why he was asking all these things. There was a long pause and he said "... The truth is... I'm in love with you." He told me he wants me to stay in Zambia and marry him. He told me he had already arranged to pay for my schooling and he even promised to build me a house. It was so so awkward. He told me like 5 times how much he loves me and he even told me that since the day he first saw me, he hasn't gone a day without thinking of me. It was seriously just so awkward. Drunk men propose to me and tell me they love me but this was different. He was serious! I tried to explain that I am a missionary and what that means and that I am going back to America when I finish and that I'm not interested in him at all but he just wouldn't have it. He eventually just told me to think about it and hung up. IT WAS SO AWKWARD! So now I'm just paranoid I'll run into him randomly. But its ok. I'll be just fine.

Then there was another weird encounter of the week. Another one of our investigators invited us to go to a "Bible study" with him and his girlfriend. One of our appointments had just fallen through so we told him we could go. We thought it would just be a one hour seminary type thing so we thought it would be cool to go and support him. So we met him at his house and he drove us waaaay over to the other side of town to this little house where we met "Prophet Mandala." Turns out the "Bible study" wasn't really a "Bible study" Our investigator wanted us to meet the prophet of his church so we would realize that our church is wrong... Luckily everyone was very friendly so it wasn't like we were over there arguing or anything. But it was just so weird! And it definitely didn't sway me at all. In fact my testimony of our church grew! Its amazing that in the times when your faith is put to the test, your faith grows the most.

The last weird experience was something John invited us to. It was "spiritual emphasis week" at his university. So he invited us to one of the services. It was just one hour in the afternoon so we went to support him. It started with some pretty cool gospel music. I enjoyed that part. But then the preaching started. The message itself was really good. It was about how because Christ suffered, He understands our suffering. But the way it was delivered was kind of terrifying! The preacher yelled the entire thing! It also made me appreciate the church. We are pretty darn lucky to have the truth.

Did I ever tell you about the fancy washing machine we have at our flat? Here's how it works: You put 2 buckets in a bath tub. You fill one with clean water and one with soapy water. Then you put your dirty clothes in the soapy bucket. Then there are these magical things called hands. You use them to wash the clothes. Then you put the clothes in the clean water to rinse them and boom! You have clean clothes! Its pretty cutting edge technology. I'm hoping the rest of the world catches up pretty soon.

I'm being brave and trying new food. I've never eaten fish like that before but it was really good! We went to visit a member when I was on exchanges and in the corner of the living room was this doll. Please tell me that's not the creepiest thing you have ever seen...

Monday, May 12, 2014

I guess for the benefit of those I didn't get a chance to talk to I'll tell you about a couple of the cool things from the week. First of all, John again! He's been out of town so we haven't actually taught him but a miracle happened with his family! We found out that his wife and two kids (who stay about 5 hours north of Lusaka) have been taking lessons from the missionaries up there! We didn't refer them and neither did John. God just really wants this family to be baptized apparently! Its amazing how the Lord makes things happen.

Melting butter over a candle because the power was out yet again. (Don't mind my Hermione hair. I'd just taken braids out)

Saturday, May 17, 2014

The week was pretty great. We did lots of tracting again. It makes the time go pretty slowly but it also makes for some funny stories. You meet the most interesting people! For example: While street contacting, a really tall skinny guy came and talked to us. He was wearing a purple shirt, purple pants, purple shoes, and a huge leopard print cowboy hat! It was hilarious. We gave him a pamphlet and introduced the church and invited him to come. Then he walked away and we kept talking to other people. About 30 seconds later we saw him sprinting back down the street yelling "SISTERS! SISTERS! WAIT!" (which freaked us out a bit) He got back to us and in an out of breath voice he said " I forgot to give you my phone number!"

On our way to our area every day we pass by a HUGE church. So the people know us pretty well there. They see us all the time. One day when we passed, one of the preachers from the church stopped us and invited us to come in and take a tour of the church. We weren't in a hurry so we agreed. That place was nuts! They had a pipe organ and everything! It was pretty awesome! On our way out he started asking questions about us and the church. We aren't allowed to proselyte at other churches but we are allowed to answer questions. When he found out which church we were from he got very excited. "I know that church! You have a big choir in America! Have you ever heard of it? I have a couple of their CDs. I'll make a copy of them so you can hear them!" We tried to tell him that it was not necessary but he was too excited. The next day when we passed by he called us over again and gave us 2 CDs of Mormon Tabernacle Choir music! It was so funny!

Hedge sculpting is a popular thing in Zambia. But usually they just make geometric shapes. I guess someone was feeling creative here.

Monday, May 26, 2014

Monday, June 2, 2014

1. Alcohol. I legitimately and honestly just do not understand why people drink. I've tried to think of even one positive thing that comes from drinking and I can't do it! There is nothing good that comes of it! It makes you act like an idiot, it makes you smell bad, it kills brain cells, it destroys families and relationships. Its just so dumb! It is one of the most frustrating thing I have had to deal with my entire mission. I understand that it can and is a legitimate addiction that is hard to overcome. So for that reason I admire people who try to give it up. But it just makes me so sad to see people with so much potential completely throw their lives away because they drink! Just don't take that first drink!!! I'm so grateful I grew up in a place and in a home where I wasn't exposed to it so now that Im old enough to make my own decisions, I have a very solid stand on the issue and there is nothing in heaven or earth that would change that.

2. The second thing I want to get off my chest is a common misconception that people have about missionaries. I just would like anyone reading this to know that missionaries are real people too! We aren't perfect. We don't know know all the answers. We can't do everything. We sure as heck will try! But we are humans too. We have been called by God and set apart by priesthood authority and have been given power unique to missionaries. So in that way we aren't just normal people. But just know that just because we have a black nametag, doesn't mean we are immune to emotions. I'm not saying this because im being mistreated or something like that. I am very happy and love this work! But just for the information of anyone reading this who has never spent time around missionaries, or who is preparing to go on a mission, or just anyone else, missionaries are people too.

1. We were walking along one day and we saw a group of men trying to get a bed frame onto the second floor of a house by hoisting it up over the balcony. Upon further inspection we saw that the man on the balcony was wearing a Utah Utes shirt. We asked him where he got it and in a very thick Zambian accent he said "I'm from Utah!" so we asked him "Oh really? which part of Utah are you from?" to which he thought for a minute and replied "Mississippi!!" It was great.

3. One day we were teaching a lesson on the side of the road. We had a member teaching with us. Before the lesson started we were just sitting on a little bench waiting for the investigator to finish something so we could start. Mary (the member) pulled out her For Strength of Youth pamphlet and was just flipping through it while we waited. A car drove up and stopped when he got to us. The man driving yelled "That book!! I need that book!! Please! Give me that book!!" We were trying to figure out which book he was talking about when he started pointing very enthusiastically at the For Strength of Youth book. Mary, being the great missionary that she is, jumped up, ran over and gave it to him. Then the man sped off cheering. It was quite odd. I hope he reads it!

4. Another day we were tracting. We knocked on a door and a nice lady opened. We introduced ourselves and asked her if she had ever heard of the Church before. She said yes so we asked her if she knew where the church was She replied "...31" At that point we realized she didn't speak English. oops.

5. Our stove exploded! So I guess this isn't really that funny but the situation was just humorous. Last night while we were cooking dinner a huge electrical spark came out of one of the burners, there was a loud pop and then the entire stove stopped working. Initially it was scary, but nothing caught on fire and everyone was fine. But then we realized that we were in the middle of making

dinner, our food was half cooked, and we had been fasting all day. It was so sad. Luckily the Humpherys saved the day. they let us come over (just next door) and finish cooking. Then Elder Humpherys came over this morning and fixed the stove. Its just funny that we seem to always have complications cooking on fast sunday!

The highlight of the week was Atkins! I told you about him a few weeks ago I think. He is the super top secret security guard that was very touched by the lesson about the Atonement. Well we can't see him very often because he works a lot but we have been seeing him as often as we can.

These little chickens are spray-painted all over Lusaka. It drives me nuts cause I dont know what it means!

Monday, June 9, 2014

Other than that the only other really out of the ordinary thing that happened was last night. One of the members of the branch presidency invited us and the Zone leaders over to his house for dinner to say goodbye. (Both of them are getting transferred too) So we get there all excited to eat cause his wife is an awesome cook. But then they told us that we were cooking! What?? They told us that there was a whole chicken defrosting and we could use whatever else we could find and we had to make dinner! Its not like I was offended or anything but it was just hilarious! And super unexpected! I actually didn't end up helping that much though. Sister Vea and Elder Shoba (one of the ZLs) did most of it. It turned out really good but it was just so funny. Then to add to the humor of everything, the power went out for like 15 minutes right in the middle of it all. And *then* to top it all off, right as we were sitting down to eat, a stray cat got inside. Everyone else there was either scared of cats or just didn't like them. So I was the lucky one who got to chase it down, catch it, and let it out. The whole evening was just glorious. Definitely one to remember.

Real African meal.

Monday, June 16, 2014

Two of the three girls we had on date to be baptized at the end of this month (who had both gotten their prayers answered that the church is true) told us that we are no longer allowed to come to their house. And the other girl that was on date moved to Livingstone, a city 5 hours away where the church hasn't been started yet.

So we ended up spending a large portion of the week tracting. I don't think I have ever had so many people be so blatantly rude to us! Usually even if they aren't interested, people are at least nice about it. But for some reason we just ran into a lot of very grumpy people this week.

There is a member in one of the other branches who works at the distribution centre. Her name is Sister Teki but all the missionaries just call her Grandma. She is pretty much the greatest member ever. She used to be a preacher at a pentacostal church and was even about to start her own church when the missionaries found her. She's been moving forward ever since then.

Sometimes she gets stacks of pass along cards from the missionaries and just stands on the streets giving them to people inviting them to church.

We asked her if there was anything else we could do to help and she invited us to bring the elders the next day and come help her reorganize the store room of the distribution centre. The next day we spent almost the entire day there helping her. We ended up not only reorganizing, but

rearranging and deep cleaning too. It was so good to go and help her. Service really does bring joy!

Monday, June 23, 2014

First of all, thank you so much for all the birthday wishes! I had a really great birthday. It wasn't too different from any other day but it was still really nice. My companion took me to go get milkshakes for lunch, everyone sang to me, Sister Mbonyana made me dinner, and most of our appointments actually went through! So it was a great day. I don't really feel any different. I still just feel like a missionary. But its cool to be a year older I guess! Its going to be weird telling people I'm 21. And its super weird to think that when I came on mission I was 19. And that last year I was in Africa too. Its definitely been a year to remember. I'm still very grateful to be here.

One cool thing is that we got a car! Its a stick shift so I'm still perfecting my driving but I'm so grateful that I learned before I came out. I would not want to be learning for the first time on Zambian streets. Zambians are crazy drivers. Sister Erickson, the mission president's wife, had me drive with her for a couple hours just to help me feel more comfortable and to have me practice going on hills. About 5 minutes into hill practice, a huge monkey ran across the street right in front of the car. I almost killed a monkey!!! It was so scary! Luckily I didn't though- Dont worry. Its things like that that remind me that I really am in Africa!

Cleaning the carpets!

African sunsets are the best in the world. That is a fact.

We got a car! I'd like to formally thank my dad, Chad Gehring, for teaching me how to drive a manual transmission car. It has officially saved my life. I'm the only sister in Lusaka who can drive this car because nobody else knows how to drive stick.

Wednesday, July 2, 2014

. I've decided that one of the most frustrating things about missionary work, if not the number one most frustrating thing, is people promising up and down that they will come to church and then not coming. It would even be better if they would just say they weren't coming! But instead, they promise and promise and promise that they will be there, but then they don't show. Its incredibly frustrating. I'm just glad Heavenly Father is in charge and not me because I don't think I could handle all these people's agency.

Its been really nice having the car. Its made things move quite a bit faster. On Friday we were able to bring a member teaching with us who we have wanted to take with us for a long time but we had no way to get her and she is too old to walk all the way to where we were going to teach.

Monday, July 7, 2014

My zone leader took this photo at the Mothers Without Borders orphanage. Its the one our branch president is in charge of. The girls in front were posing for the picture, but in the background, a little girl named Precious was "doing the hair" of another little girl. I laughed pretty hard when he showed this to me

Monday, July 14, 2014

One exciting piece of news from the week is that I found out that I have been officially reassigned to the Zambia Lusaka mission. woohoo! Up untill now I have still been a visa waiter.

It's not so much that I didn't want to go back to Botswana, but its just nice to know for sure now what is going on. Plus I really like Zambia. I was hoping Id' get to stay here. And now I will! Things at our house have been super hectic lately too. There are 7 of us now staying in the same flat. Its a big flat but still... thats a lot of sisters. Luckily we all get along great. Its pretty cool- 3 of the sisters (Sister Fokoto, Sister Mbonzana, and Sister Makunye) all speak xhosa. Its a South African language with clicks in it. Sometimes they speak it to each other in the house. Its awesome! Sister Fokoto is teaching me how to click. There are 3 different types of clicks in xhosa. The letter x makes one, the letter c makes another, and the letter q makes another. I'm ok at the c and the x but the q is kind of hard. But I've been practicing. By the time we aren't companions anymore I'll be a pro.

Monday, July 21, 2014

This whole having a car things is super convenient but sometimes it causes problems. We got a crack in the wind shield one day so we had to go get it fixed. The day before that we had to get our tires changed. The man at the tire place recommended a specific window repair place so we figured that was a good place to try. Well we tried to find it and it was super far away in a super sketchy part of town. So we asked Elder Allred and Elder Hill (our zone leaders) to go with us so we didn't die. Its a good thing too. That place was crazy. But the window was fixed and everything turned out fine. The guy that fixed the window even knew about the church! When we asked him if he had ever heard about the church before he said "Of course! I'm even friends with Gordon B. Hinckley on facebook!" It was hilarious.

We met another hilarious guy a different day. He told us that he had just gotten out of confinement for schizophrenia. We had a wonderful conversation with him. I love all the interesting people you meet on mission.

Some other awesome news is that I got to go to a chiropractor! One of the volunteers from the orphanage is a chiropractor and he gave all the missionaries free adjustments! It was awesome. I felt so great after.

Yesterday was wonderful too. One of the people I have been teaching ever since I was with Sister Vea finally came to church!! Her name is Violet and she is powerful. She loves the Book of Mormon, has prayed and knows everything we have taught is true. The only thing keeping her back from being baptized is that the person she stays with wouldn't let her come to church. But this week, she was finally able to come!!!! We were so excited. If she is able to keep coming she is getting baptized on 10 August.

Then yesterday night we (all 6 missionaries in the Lusaka branch) got to go to dinner at the relief society president's house. While we were waiting for her to finish cooking we were singing hymns. Right in the middle of the song "The Lord is My Light" the power went off. It was pretty ironic. They didn't come back on for a while so we just kept singing. It was actually pretty cool.

Monday, July 28, 2014

Once upon a time I am companions with an awesome sister missionary from South Africa. Her name is Sister Fokoto. She hates frogs. A lot. Yesterday morning as we were walking into church, Sister Fokoto screamed at the top of her lungs and teleported across the church's lawn (ok maybe not but she ran fast enough to call it that). I ran over to her to see what was wrong. Guess what was wrong... yup. She'd seen a frog. I about died laughing. I've never seen anyone run so fast! I love my companion.

Well this week was pretty much the same as all the other weeks. We did missionary work, we did some service, we met some crazy people, we laughed, we sang, we did it again the next day. Life is good.

ROME

November 18, 2013

We met an African lady dressed in a bright teal spandex jumpsuit who asked us to come preach to her on the bus. So that was cool.

Tuesday we did some finding in this cute park (I love park finding). There was a bus/metro strike so it took us forever to get there and we only had like 10 min to do finding before we had to leave. I stopped the first people we saw and it was this cute young couple.

Anyway, so this guy is SUPER interested. He starts telling us that he has been going through a trial of faith because he goes to church and realizes that they aren't teaching what the bible says... So we exchanged numbers and he says, "*So can I come to church on Sunday?*".. miracles. serious miracles.

They shipped in a ton of Americans to figure out why the Italians aren't getting it done fast enough (pranzo hours.. that's why).

So that means more people for me to translate for in Relief Society, but I secretly love it because they spoil us like grandmas do.

We found another new potential just by smiling. hah. Typical sister missionary story, right? We were walking down the street and I was just smiling and saying "hello" to everyone that passed. I realized we wrote down the house number wrong and we needed to go back to the other end of the street.

So we started walking back and one of the guys that we said "*good morning*" to was at the stoplight and he started asking us questions. We were able to give him a Book of Mormon and he asked about church and asked if he could come and we got his number!

Seriously we are finding people out of no where. This has NEVER happened to me. Last night at the bus stop this guy says,

"Hey, so do you guys have one of those books from Joseph Smith?"
and I'm like "Excuse me?! You know about Joseph Smith?!"

He tells us that he has friends in England who are Mormons. He is from Romania, so we got his number so we could bring him a copy in Romanian. We have NEVER had this much success in finding people that will even listen, let alone give us a chance to explain more. So we are super blessed.

Yesterday we went to look for someone, but her name wasn't written on the citofono.

How it works in Italy is that every apartment building has a set of doorbells on the outside, so you have to ring the doorbell to get let in. Then sometimes you have to be let in again to get past the gate INSIDE and then again AT the door. When you ring outside, there is a little speaker where they ask who it is... but sometimes they don't ask and just buzz you in.

Anyway, we go up to the top floor where this person let us in without saying anything... We are waiting at the door and I hear this noise.. that sounds like Darth Vader... and it's coming from inside the house.. getting closer and closer to the door.

So Sorella Foster hits the button to the elevator because we are both freaked out.. and the noise is getting louder and louder as we wait for this elevator and it arrives JUST as we hear this loud creepy oxygen tank type thing RIGHT at the door. We run in the elevator trying not to scream as I'm saying "HIT THE BUTTON! GET US OUT OF HERE!"... the joys of casa.

November 29, 2013

President didn't want to make a lot of changes because there are THREE holidays this transfer: Thanksgiving this week (which no one celebrates, so I kind of forget about it--sorry Aimee I know it's your favorite) and then Christmas and New Year's. So Sorella Foster and I are staying together.

It's been a really cold week here in Rome. It's rained almost every day.. and I got holes in my RAINBOOTS too... (Thanks Nonna for convincing me to bring rainboots) so my feet have been cold and wet.

But other than the rain, it's been really good. Last pday we went to the craziest museum. It's a crypt decorated entirely with bones of dead friars. yes, you heard me. so creepy. Imagine walking into a dimly lit room COVERED in human bones.

Also we went to the mall after to buy things for winter because it's WAY colder than I thought it would be and I NEEDED a warm blanket.

Sorella Fossa and I got to teach this pregnant lady named Zara the Plan of Salvation and it was so good. It was cool teaching with a sister who is about the same age as me in the mission and who speaks the language. The lesson went so smoothly and it just felt good to testify of Jesus Christ and his role in our lives here on earth.

We have seen lots of other miracles this week, one of which is a new investigator. Guess where from: BRAZIL. not just brazil, Belo Horizonte.

December 2, 2013

Happy Thanksgiving to all at home!

I hope it was filled with Turkey and Gratitude.

We are so blessed to be serving in Rome 2 because we have several American families here either as missionaries, working on the temple, or working with the government.. so we got 2 American Thanksgivings and 1 Italian Thanksgiving.

It was the best. As I was sitting around the table eating a beautiful plate of homemade lasagna and I was thinking, "Why don't WE do this every year?" So my new tradition is that I will always make a homemade Italian lasagna for Thanksgiving.

People told me that the problem with serving in Italy would be the traditions of (other religions)... but in reality the problem is that most people have become uninterested in religion and have given up on spirituality.

So it's really incredible to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to someone who is honestly seeking Jesus Christ in her life. AND she comes to church every Sunday for ALL three meetings. AND the RS president and her husband invited us all to their house tomorrow night, so we are really happy about that. We have the best members. So willing to help with our work. Also she is going to bring Brazilian food to the Christmas party. yay.

Then this lady gets up to give her seat up for an old lady and comes to stand by me.. so I start talking to her and she is from this totally random country that I have never heard of and she invites us over Sunday night to her house! So we are excited about her.

So last night we were doing more finding and I made a goal to have 3 really good conversations about the gospel before we got home. The first was with this sweet old man who told me that it was so beautiful to see people actually devoted to their religion instead of just going on Sunday and not really practicing throughout the week.

The second was on the metro when there was this beer bottle that was knocked over and rolled down the aisle, so I stopped it with my foot and picked it up to throw it away. Then I realized it probably looked bad for a missionary to be holding a giant empty beer bottle.. so I turned bright red as the people by me were watching me.

So I just said, "I don't want people to think it's mine."

One guy was like, "Yeah, that might not look too good."

and I said "Yeah, especially while I'm wearing this name tag with Jesus Christ's name on it."

So this nice old man offered to throw it away so I wouldn't be embarrassed and the guy I had been talking to asked where I was from. Turns out his family used to meet with the missionaries and invited them over for Thanksgiving and everything. so cool.

The last conversation was with a girl that had converted from Christianity to Islam.. so that was really interesting. That's what I love about being a missionary: just talking to people. People will tell you anything if you just ask. I've met so many incredible people from just talking to them on the street, in the metro, in the train, anywhere really.

December 11, 2013

Then we had a lesson on Thursday and we invited Sorella Steurer to come with us (the Steurers work in the office, and since we teach in English we thought it would be a cool option for her to teach with us) and it went REALLY well.

Last pday Sorella Foster and I decided to try "chestnuts roasting on an open fire" because it seems like the Christmas thing to do... and so I asked this old Italian man how you eat them... and so he takes one in his hands, cracks it open, and starts to hand feed it to me haha. Then he went in for a "baccino" or to kiss me on the cheek and luckily I got away. Sorella Foster wasn't so lucky. He did the same thing to her and I just watched as he went in for it. so funny.

Sorella Foster has this funny face she makes when she is scared and doesn't know what to do. I just laugh (because it's funny) but it makes her mad. The only other times I've seen that face was when a member started breastfeeding during an appointment and another time when I made her sit by herself on the bus to talk to people and she got approached by a drunk guy... good times.

We had ALL of Saturday open because we only had one appointment scheduled (who stood us up anyway) so we planned on visiting some people that we've talked to before. We were on the bus and this sweet old lady asked someone to help her get her shopping cart (not the american ones.. they are smaller with two wheels) off the bus.

So I asked her if we could help her take it to her house. Usually people decline our offers of assistance, but I insisted and she agreed to let us help.

So we got off the bus and there was this HUGE hill to her apartment building. She kept thanking us because she didn't know how she would have been able to get up the hill.

So we got to the top of the hill and she thanked us and told us we could go, but there was about 20 stairs up to the apartment building, so I told her we were going to take it up the stairs. She protested but I started walking up anyway. She thanked us again, saying how hard it is for her at 85-years-old to walk all those stairs.

She said, "I can take it from here."

and I said, "Signora, what floor do you live on? "

"Oh no don't worry about it."

"Signora, which floor?"

"*Third..*" which in America is actually the 4th. So we take her groceries to the top floor of her apartment as she tells us how long it takes her to walk all those stairs with her bag of groceries.

Then when we got to the door she told us that we were angels sent from our Heavenly Father and that she had been praying for someone to come help. I laughed to myself as I remembered all the times she had denied our help even though she had been praying for that help.

December 17, 2013

Usually there are a ton of people in our lessons with her, but this week it was just us three. It was great because she really opened up to us about what has been holding her back and we were able to help her with those issues.

We had the ward Christmas party this week and it was way fun. A lot of members brought friends and they did a Christmas skit and we had a dinner together. It was a really fun night and Carol came and brought Brazilian dolci.

Then on Sunday night we did caroling at the Spanish Steps which was great, but so scary because only six of the missionaries showed up and some tourists.

It was super fun and we are going to try and do it this week too. It's funny because the Spanish Steps are right across from all the ritzy stores in Rome.. so people would walk down that street and end up stopping at the stairs to hear us singing Christmas hymns.

December 28, 2013

Monday we had an FHE with Carol and the Teodosi family, and it was so much fun. We had pizza and joked about how Italians pronounce Albuquerque "alber-koo-key" and then we taught a lesson about following the prophet and it was a beautiful experience for us to all share our testimonies about living-day prophets.

Tuesday we taught Carol the Word of Wisdom. It was really great because she was a ballerina for 20 years so she has a really strong testimony of living a healthy lifestyle. Sorella Foster made me laugh because she said if I have taught her one thing it's the importance of eating healthy... I know you don't believe me Mom...

I've been feeling guilty because honestly the Christmas season hasn't felt much different to me than other days, so I wanted to know what was wrong with me. Why wasn't I feeling more of the Christmas spirit like everyone said I should? and I decided it's just because here on the mission every day is Christ-centered. Every day we are thinking of Him and sharing our testimony of him.

January 1, 2014

Monday for pday we got to go to a Christmas market in Piazza Navona, and I bought a little nativity set.

That night we went to a family home evening with the Canzachi family, who is one of my favorite families.. Fratello Canzachi makes me laugh.. One thing about Italians is that they all seem to have a million cell phones.

Anziano Prieto asked Fratello Canzachi to tell him which numbers listed in the phone were actually his because there were so many.. turns out they were all his. One cell phone for at home, one he just keeps in the car so he doesn't forget, one for at work, etc., etc... so we had to change the names in the phone to "Fratello Canzachi's car phone, work phone, home phone," etc., etc.

I felt impressed to stop this one family as they were walking away. Turns out they are from Greece and the dad just moved to Salt Lake City! When he found out we were Mormons he was like, "*You've got to be kidding me! I live in Salt Lake and half the people in my company are Mormons.*"

For Christmas Eve we went to a member's house for cena. The Christmas Eve tradition in Italy is fish... lots and lots of fish... Just the day before Sorella Wiltbank and I were talking about pickiness -- what we would eat and what we couldn't eat.

Sorella Wiltbank said, "*I can eat ANYTHING but fish.*" So imagine our dismay when we showed up early to help prepare dinner with the family and Sorella Wiltbank is given on the job of spearing caviar (fish eggs) and spreading the salmon puree (like Mom used to do to veggies to hide it in things--like cake) on toast.

Anziano Kasper got the worst of it though: battering up baby octopus and frying it in the pan... BABY OCTOPUS. Not even just the legs or anything but the whole thing.. you just pop it in your mouth like popcorn.

So Sorella Wiltbank is having a small mental breakdown because everything is fish: seafood salad, fried octopus, fish bread. The only things that don't look fishy are the fried mushrooms, fried cheese, and a fruit salad. So we decided to fill up the plate with safe-looking things like oranges and fried cheese.

Then Sorella Wiltbank turns to me and says, "*Sorella.. there is fish juice on the oranges.*"

I'm just having flashbacks to when Mom and Paige used to make fun of me saying that I would go to China on my mission and have to eat weird seafood. You probably don't believe me, but I tried everything... even fish eggs, even fried octopus and even fried mushrooms.

Okay, so I skipped on the seafood salad (which I don't really consider a salad because there is no lettuce involved, but who am I to argue?)

Sorella Wiltbank went into the bathroom to say a prayer and oh my, the Lord does answer prayers. As we were sitting at the table the family's dog came and just stuck his head in her lap... yeah. She fed her WHOLE dinner to the dog piece-by-piece. So we are trying to keep from laughing, but it's impossible... she is feeding her fish food to the dog.

So this sorella just turns and is like, "What are you guys laughing about?" We have to think of SOMETHING to say, so Sorella Wiltbank says, "La sorella ha detto qualcosa buffa... riguardo le mie scarpe." which means "The sister said something funny... about my shoes?" and she bought it.

But even though we felt sick that night and several days after, it was still the best dinner appointment ever just because it was so much fun being together and laughing together. We love this family.

we got to sleep in and open our packages together in the morning. We were SO tired because our noisy Asian neighbors woke us up at 2 am when they were opening presents and SCREAMING for several hours...

but we got to sleep an extra hour so, va bene. Then we had pranzo with the Celestini family and it was SO GOOD.

When we got there, Sorella Celestini's mom was making homemade lasagna and there was just this huge VAT of red sauce. So we ate lunch with their whole family which was really fun. They have 5 boys and one little daughter who is the youngest. Their oldest son is on a mission in Scotland, so they really spoiled us.

I'm so grateful for the incredible families here in Rome. They really made Christmas a home away from home this year.

Friday we got to see Giorgia and we committed her to quit smoking! So send some extra prayers her way.. She REALLY wants to get baptized, so we are working on some commandments to get her ready to be baptized the same day as her little brother (who is working with the anziani). We love this family and getting to visit them.

Saturday was our miracle nothing day. We got a bidone in the morning (someone who didn't show up to an appointment) and then the whole afternoon we had finding planned because everyone is gone for the holidays.

But it just felt like we were doing a bunch of nothing because the buses weren't coming by and when they did come, there was no one on them to talk to. So there was about 20 minutes left in the day and we were thinking about going home because there was NO ONE around.

We saw this bus pass by and I thought, "I can't remember where this bus ends. Let's just take it because I know it doesn't go too far."

So we got on the bus and we were the only ones on it. I started joking with Sorella Wiltbank about how in Cagliari there were times I felt like Heavenly Father would send me weird places to get me out of the way.

As we were talking about it, the bus arrived at the last stop and the bus driver got out for his break. I asked him a question about this strange noise we heard (it sounded like guns, but it was just fireworks).

We have another new investigator this week named Carlos. He is a referral from the members and he is 9 years old. He told his mom that he doesn't want to play soccer on Sunday because he wants to go to church. The Lord is so good to us. I love it here in Rome. I could stay until the end of my mission and be okay with it.

January 7, 2014

NEW YEAR'S IS REALLY CRAZY HERE. Fireworks are not illegal.. at least if they are no one cares.. and they set them off ALL week. & they either sound like giant bombs or gun shots. So we were jumpy all New Year's Eve.

Also because I THOUGHT President established a come home early time for safety but then I realized that he didn't. I didn't want to be lazy, so I made us stay out till nine which probably wasn't the safest thing... especially after we saw people dropping fireworks out of there apartment windows 10 feet away from us. (We might have exaggerated and said that people were throwing them AT us... but everyone likes a good story)

New Year's day was boring because we just cleaned ALL day and got ALL the gross mold out of our apartment. I took pictures, but I'm not showing Mom because she might make me come home.

Also our upstairs neighbors broke a tube in their bathroom so our ceiling was dripping water until they admitted that it was their fault and fixed it... gross. but now its clean and shiny and free of mold for at least a week.

He was really upset that we didn't have anything "new" to say about religion. He was like "You mean you just teach the SAME gospel that Jesus Christ taught and all the prophets in the bible taught?"

"Yes. Exactly."

Apparently he was hoping for some new found philosophy on to build his life on. It is sad to see that people will accept the works of philosophers and musicians and politicians and all sorts of things before they will accept the pure, simple, faith building principles of Jesus Christ.

Before the mission (and a lot during) I had SO many people talk to me about "planting seeds," that Rome is SUCH a hard mission and that there are SO many Catholics and that people won't change and that I would just be planting seeds.

January 13, 2014

I was like, okay, let's go do finding somewhere else... They really wanted to go knocking doors, which in Italy means standing outside ringing doorbells and having people reject you over a speaker. So I said, "*Okay, why not?*" But we get to the first apartment building and the doorwoman kicks us out. "*OKAY, let's go do something ELSE*"...

So we tried street finding and these poor greenies have never stopped a person in their lives. I remember having that same fear in my eyes.. and Italians smell fear. So that didn't go over well.

It was also fun because President asked us to stay at the Villa with them and we got to take a GOOD shower instead of our terrible, moldy sit-down shower. Yeah, I won't get into details.

January 22, 2014

But really it was a good week. Monday we went to the Coloseo (*the Colosseum*) and Il Foro Romano (*the Roman Forum*) because Sorella Wiltbank hadn't seen the inside and it was really a perfect day and I took my FILM camera so I hope the photos turn out good.

Like about tithing she said, "It makes sense. Why would I take the little extra money that I have when I could give it to the Lord and he would do so much more with it?"..

We got a new washer! Sorella Wiltbank was laughing at me because she would just catch me in the bathroom, staring at the new washer because its beautiful and it makes our clothes CLEAN. it's been so long.

Also we tried to make Mexican food but we had to use parmesan cheese.. so yeah you can imagine how that turned out.

ALSO, I ALMOST GOT ROBBED. By a pregnant Gypsie. on the metro.

As I was putting my phone back in my bag, I CAUGHT HER HAND IN MY PURSE. Normally I'm really good about keeping my bag in front of me, and I've never had a problem. But we were traveling and I had my little suitcase and lots of things that I was dealing with, so I wasn't watching my bag as closely.

Luckily this little Bangladesian man warned me who it was right after I caught her, so she got off at the next stop. Then all the Italians were like, "*YEAH, I SAW HER TOO*"

and the Bangladesian said, "*WELL THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY ANYTHING?*"

This Italian girl said, "*Yeah, I got robbed the other day and NO ONE said anything to me.*"

So today I'm thankful for Bangladesians..

To top the week off, we went to pranzo with the Celestini family yesterday because we are teaching a little boy at their house. They had a family from Scotland there because their son is serving in Scotland and this family was in Rome to visit. So we got to translate during lunch for this little old Scottish couple.

Sorella Celestini speaks English because she served in England, but it was SUPER hard to understand with the accent. It was funny because we could understand both sides, but they couldn't really understand each other.

So we were talking to the Italians at the table and they were like, "HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND ANYTHING THEY ARE SAYING?" because to them it's like German. Funny.

January 28, 2014

hi. Sorry, I'm probably not going to write much this week because it's so cold that my fingers hurt. just warning you. pray for nicer weather. PRAY FOR SUN

It's just a big love fest in Roma 2: love for the members, love for our investigators, love for our district.. just lots of love.

we were walking by Il Vittoriano, which is this huge, white building that I never could figure out what it was built for.

They have a little free museum underneath, and we stop to look at it--because it's free and nothing here is free.

This Italian man waves us over and we chat and offer him English course and he says, "*You do something for me, I do something for you.. follow me.*"

Then he turns to this lady and says "*Watch the door. I'll be back. I'll explain later.*"

So we follow this man into an elevator and we are a little sketched out, but not too bad. He takes us outside to another elevator with a bunch of other Italians and tells them to "*Take them up*" and they all say "*Yes, boss.*"

They take us up this elevator to the VERY TOP of this building that overlooks ALL of Rome and you really can see EVERYTHING.

So now we offer English course to everyone because it gets us access to cool places and free stuff (like perfume samples).

After church we half begged an American family to have us for lunch with Carol because our afternoon appointment was cancelled, and it was the best.

They had fixed a crock pot meal. yay!! and 2 loaves of homemade bread. It's like they already knew we would be coming over..

So it was a good week. We have been SUPER tired, because it's cold and there is no sun and it rains a lot.

Carol's baptism is on Saturday and the Americans sisters said they are bringing dolci for a little party afterwards. (They don't do after-baptism refreshments here.. so we are trying to get that on track.)

February 4, 2014

Monday it was raining all day so we stayed inside and wrote a lot of letters. boring. I know. But it was nice to get a break and it was seriously miserable to even go outside and do the shopping. So we vegged for my first pday ever. Monday night we had an FHE with the Teodosi family..

Also we have the NOISIEST Asian neighbors... twice we have had to move our mattresses into the study room because they think it's okay to salsa dance at midnight... or this week's karaoke marathon with a special "Killing Me Softly" musical number that I found extremely ironic.

But really though... why isn't it easy for us to always recognize our answers from God? Why doesn't he just give us dreams like he does for most Italians?

With scambi miracles, we met the coolest people. I gave a Book of Mormon away to a man on the train who has a Russian wife and a daughter named Helga.

Also, they changed the binnario (*track platform*) where our train comes usually, so everyone was confused.

There was this man who looked super lost and he just yelled "*How do I get to Monte Rotondo?!*"

So I was like, "Hey!! Come with us! We will take you"..

So he followed us and I realized that he doesn't speak much Italian. So he started speaking to me in Spanish AND I UNDERSTOOD HIM.

It was weird.. I taught him like the whole first lesson in Italian and he was responding to everything in Spanish. It's like I don't remember anything from high school Spanish, but I understood the meaning of everything he was saying.

Sorella McKenna kept asking me, "*What is he saying?*" I don't know how I knew, but I knew.

Anyway, he was super excited because he found out we were Mormons and he said

"Are you serious? We have TONS of Mormons where I am from in the Dominican Republic.. They all ride bikes and wear ties."

Thursday we got followed by this scary Libyan guy for a while, so I told Sorella Wiltbank she isn't allowed to talk to Libyans anymore. We blamed it on Anz. Perry because President made a new rule that elders can't give the sisters rides anymore. So he couldn't give us a ride with them to correlation...

Also we started a new Language Study exercise where we take American songs and try to translate them into Italian and sing them. It's really annoying and really funny and the elders started getting into it too.. "Call Me Maybe" in Italian is the worst.

It had been raining ALL week. Then on Saturday we spent all day getting ready for the baptism and when we got back home for lunch, the clouds parted and there was this HUGE rainbow. It was so cheesy, but so perfect--just like the Primary song.

February 11, 2014

Monday it rained all day again so we stayed inside for pday. hurrah.

And then we had an appointment that night that got canceled because it was raining so hard that it eroded a hill that blocked off the street. Same thing with the train tracks, so we couldn't even get into Centro if we wanted. But we got to do some finding in the rain and found a couple cool contacts so that was nice.

Tuesday we had a lesson with Simon, a man we found at the train station, and we were passing him off to the anziani and it was a really good lesson. He is a really spiritual guy, one of the ones who really takes what we are saying seriously and has that real intent.

Wednesday we went and saw Patrizia at the crazy home like we do once a transfer. She asked me if I was pregnant, so that was cool, and then she started stroking my hair and telling me I'm beautiful, so that was weird.

Also we had a lesson with Maria and she talked for 15 minutes straight, then kept interrupting to tell us about why she thinks Padre Pio is an apostle. So we have to drop her. Italians love Padre Pio.

We were at the bus stop when this lady walks up to us and says, "*You know, it's my birthday.*"

So we say, "*Happy Birthday!*" and ask her if she is doing anything to celebrate.

She says, "No, I'll probably have lunch with friends or something on Sunday, but I'm just going home right now."

So we are feeling super bad for this old Italian lady that kind of looks like Mad-Eye Moody from HP, and so I say the first thing that comes to my mind which happens to be "*Hey, do you want us to sing Happy Birthday to you?*" and she said "*Yes.*"

So we did. and I think it made her happy. and that's what missionary work is about: making people happy.

Saturday morning we continued our scambi and visited one of their new investigators who lives in an African refugee camp. I love teaching Africans because this guy pulls out the Book of Mormon and says,

"I know this book is true. I just know it. I just want to understand it. I have a lot of questions, but I know it's true".

We also visited the neighbor in the camp who is a member and she has these two little girls and they keep trying to jump into our arms. Satan knows that the hardest rule for me is not to hold babies and so he tries to tempt me with cute African toddlers.

So we teach her the Restoration in the McDonalds, and I love being a missionary because you can just do that. She called us "*Mormoncine*" and said that Mormons are cute and don't look like witches like she thought and she said she was going to come to church.

We also taught Shadi, our investigator from Iran and she has read up to Helaman in the Book of Mormon, but doesn't understand any of it. So we are working on the basics with her... starting with God and Jesus Christ. It's just tough because she is reading in Persian, so we have no idea what part she is really at. We'll figure it out.

We also had a lesson with a Catholic priest from Zambia and that was probably the coolest lesson of the week. He was really touched by the idea of authority (probably because we mentioned it in almost every sentence) and our testimony of Jesus Christ. It was such a great Sunday. Shadi came to church and stayed all three hours and didn't understand a word.. but she still stayed.

We had to teach the Primary. They planned it all out for us, but the kids started smooshing glue sticks and saying it looked like mozzarella--and that's why I love Italy because everything ties back to mozzarella.

Then we went back to the Canzachi's friends' house to show them the Restoration movie. It's always interesting teaching with members, mostly because Italians like to yell at each other and it doesn't always bring the best spirit, but at the end everyone is still friends. So we are working on that too.

I could never put into words really how much I love Italy, how much I love these people, how much I love this work. I know that it's all true.

February 18, 2014

Monday we spent p-day with Carol. She took us to all the secret sites of Rome and it was beautiful.

We also stopped and got white hot chocolate with pistachio on a little island off of the river Tevere.

Communique: We just got a lot of stand-up appointments this week. we counted. 13 appointments scheduled that fell through. that's a lot. so we did a lot of finding this week.

We also did another scambio where I went to Rome 1 with Sorella Williams.. We were pretty happy because it looked like the rain had passed, so we might have forgotten umbrellas and then an hour later found ourselves seeking shelter under bushes with a scarves over our heads...

It rained so much the river flooded the streets

BUT after the storm passed and we stopped back home for 15 min to blow dry ourselves off (because if you don't the Italians will SCOLD you for getting colpa d'aria and dying).

We saw the most BEAUTIFUL rainbow. I can't even tell you. Italian skies.. It's just another world.

We were on the bus that night and the bus got stuck trying to go down this little street because there was a car parked in a wrong part of the road...

All the Italians started honking and getting mad at the bus driver and he was trying to pass but couldn't go either direction... so he opened the bus doors to try and pass, giving the car space to go inside of the bus thinking it would give him more room..

But then he was even more stuck and couldn't close the bus doors... The people behind were really mad and started pounding on all the windows telling everyone to get off the bus..

We were sitting there like "*WHY?*"

I'll tell you why: because they wanted us help MOVE THE CAR with their bare hands... yes. They just picked up the car and moved it out of the way.

& I thought.. "Yeah, this doesn't really happen in America."

And that why I love Italy: because things like that just happen here and no one is phased by it.

Friday I almost forgot it was Valentine's Day. We had English Course and everyone was sad-- because those who came to English course were there because they didn't have dates. Holidays just don't really exist as a missionary. sad but true.

Also Sorella Wiltbank and I tell everyone we are twins. The Italians love it.

"Rome, you will remain eternal within me"

February 25, 2014

Monday we spent p-day with all the departing missionaries, which was sad. but fun. Get this: we went bowling. yeah. bowling in Rome. Definitely the elders' idea, and I definitely put up a fight..

Then Monday night we did a FHE with the Salerno family and Shadi.. It is really cool to teach her because we get to start from square one and teach her all about Jesus Christ and his life and his purpose.. I've never taught someone without a Christian background, so I've been learning a lot for myself about Jesus Christ and his role and his life.

Tuesday we did a service project with the elders. The elders quorum volunteered to clean up a street and so all the missionaries went to help. Except every time we tried to pick up a tool of any sort, the leaders would be like

"SORELLE! Don't touch that; I don't want you to hurt yourself."

and I'm like "*Guys, it's a rake, tranquillo*"..

They told us OUR job was to hand out the "Mormon Helping Hands" vests and to spread Nutella on bread... (Italian gender rules)..

So Sorella Wiltbank and I grabbed rakes and ran off before anyone could tell us no..

until we got tired and gave in to spreading Nutella on bread.

She invited us to her CUTE apartment and she invited her ex-boyfriend and her college aged son to come and listen as well. It was probably one of the most elegant lessons I've ever been to.. elegant in the fact that it's fun teaching well educated people that have really thought hard about

religion and spirituality-- that's how I love talking about it as well.

We also had another lesson with Simona, another one of our new investigators who even came to church on Sunday! She is 21 years old and really cute. (Things that tip off the members that we have a new investigator in church: lip rings).

We also saw Ilenia and she is doing really well. She came to church on Sunday as well! She said she has been praying EVERY DAY and that she feels like Heavenly Father is listening to her and answering her prayers.

That is so amazing because a few months ago she didn't even believe in God.

Then another great Sunday. We went to lunch with the Wilkins (American family) and they gave us VANILLA. Like real American vanilla.. not the powdered Italian kind.

March 3, 2014

He invited a TON of his high school friends to come and we got to meet his family for the first time. That was the best part: while the elders were helping him get ready, Sorella Wiltbank and I got to talk to his family.

They were really excited for Luca and couldn't believe all the changes he had made in his life. This is the kid who plays rock music and refuses to cut his long curly hair... getting baptized at age 17. They were so shocked and so proud of him.

We had a really great rest of the week too. The ward organized this huge carnival activity for the primary and invited a TON of families to come.

Last pday we went bike riding in Villa Borghese and it was REALLY fun. We wanted to just relax, but we didn't want to stay inside. So it was the perfect pday because we just took big blankets and sat in the sun and wrote letters.

ALSO the Stuerers took all the missionaries out for Burger King and it was really fun. But made us all drowsy for the rest of the day... American fast food.

March 11, 2014

But I keep saying to myself, at least I'm finding in Rome and not in Cagliari because we don't see all the same people every day. Except sometimes we do.

Then they say something like "*Don't you remember? I said I'm really not interested at all..*" So then we both end up just complaining about the rain and the traffic and the crazy people on the bus. It's really easy to bond with Italians, you just have to hate all the same things and ask them how to make lasagna.

We went to the Vatican with Carol on Monday which was fun.. but also stressful because I remembered that I'm studying art history in college and that I've forgotten everything and I'm going to have to do a lot of makeup studying when I get back.

It was fun to be with a young missionary again because they are still really energetic and will talk to anyone.. Especially the old homeless men with no teeth. It's funny because after a while you start ruling people out - or at least are wary of them.

I know it's bad and you probably shouldn't, but I just think "*The Church has enough people to take care of; Italy needs people who can take care of the Church*"..

Anyway, we were on the bus and this sorella starts talking with these two gypsy kids. Afterwards, she is like "*Sorella, they are so golden!*" & anyone who has ever tried to teach gypsies here in Rome knows it's not a good idea.

For example I met this really cute 23 year old girl from Denmark. She is here studying Italian and we started chatting while waiting for the metro. Obviously we started talking about the church and she started asking all the normal questions that people think about Mormons like, "*Are you allowed to use electricity?*" and "*How many wives does your dad have?*"

It's cute because they all say it in a curious way and try not to be offensive by asking. Then they still don't believe us when I say we don't practice polygamy anymore.

But this girl was telling me about how shocked she was that someone would leave everything behind to go talk to people about Jesus Christ and his church, because in Denmark people only get baptized so they can get money from relatives. After a while she started to really open up and told me that she didn't know if she believed in God.

She isn't an atheist, but she just has never had a relationship with God. I asked her if she had ever prayed in her life, and she said "no,"

There is a Buddhist bus driver that we run into ALL the time. The other day he was driving the bus on the other side of the street and we were waiting at the bus stop and he stopped the bus and stuck half of his body out of the window to yell "*DESTINY UNITES US AGAIN*".. so cute, the bus driver.

Last night we were coming home and there was a lady parked in the middle of the street because her engine had died... so we ask her if we can help push her car. She was REALLY skeptical that we would be able to push her car. but we did. and it started rolling down the hill and she just hopped in and yelled "*VADO!*" and she was off.

Also it was WOMEN'S DAY in Italy and Jomar got us flowers.

March 17, 2014

We were also a little down because we have been working with Shadi, just really trying to help her learn about Jesus Christ.. then one day she started asking Carol about baptism and she got really excited about it and asked us if she could get baptized..

After looking into the situation a little more closely we found out that she can't get baptized because it could be life threatening for her if she ever went back to Iran, which she was planning on doing.

So we had to break the news to her this week and she seemed pretty upset about it, but we told

her she can keep coming to church and to activities and to stay with it because one day laws might change and her circumstance could change too.

In the morning the assistants dropped us off in little cities around Latina to check out the work and do some finding. So they dropped me and Sorella Anstead off in this little town called Ardea and basically said

"Good luck. Find a way to Latina by one o'clock and we will meet you there."

and we are like *"Yeah, sure, no problem."* and I'm slightly freaking out inside but at the same time really excited.

So we just walked around talking to people on the street asking lots of questions like "Hey, where are we?"

and "How do you take a bus to Latina from here?"

and they are like "You know it's 45 kilometers away, right? You have to take a bus to another city and then take a bus from that city to Latina."

My favorite experience was with this Kenyan guy named Johnson. We were walking down the street and there was a huge group of people outside of the local church. We found out that it was a funeral for an 18-year-old boy. It was really sad because there were so many people and everyone was crying.

As missionaries we just wanted to go over there and just started preaching about the Plan of Salvation, but at the same time we didn't want to be inconsiderate. Also it's against the rules to teach people outside of other religious buildings.

Also, we spent WAY too much time with the elders in the van that day. Sorella Anstead and I are a little concerned about our 9 HOUR drive to Catania with them this week. I will survive. I will survive. Sometimes I forget that missionaries are 18-20 year old boys.

April 7, 2014

Thursday we took the train ALL day down to Sicily. It was a long trip but really beautiful. The train follows the coast so we got to see the ocean all the way down.

Then once it gets to the tip of the boot, they load the train onto a boat to take it across to Sicilia. So we all got to get off the train and head up on deck to get fresh air and see the sea.

It was also really fun because when you are on SUCH a long train ride (circa 12 ore) you make friends with everyone on the cabin and have really great gospel discussions (they can't really run away can they?) and we got some referrals for the other cities.

So first off.. I LOVE Siracusa. Seriously it is SUCH a beautiful city. Way different than Rome. Like completely opposite.

It's a little seaside town and there is this beautiful little island right off the coast. I convinced Sorella Williams to go running with me in the mornings... So we run to the coast and back, and it is the most BEAUTIFUL view of the Mediterranean Sea. My life is a dream, I know.

So I'll just end with a little story from this weekend. We had a full night of finding to do and so we walked outside and a bus passed by. Here in Siracusa there are NO buses.. we walk everywhere (meno male) and so to see a bus stop at the bus stop was surprising. So we decided to take it to wherever it went.

While on the bus I was talking to an old Sicilian man with no teeth and Sorella Williams waved at this lady who walked on and happens to be a less-active member. She asked her if we could go to the church together and have a lesson. So we went and shared a little thought on faith and then headed out.

When we walked out the door there were three people just standing outside of the church looking really lost. So we asked if we could help them and they said "*We are trying to get to Ortigia, could you help us get there?*"

We had just been planning to go to Ortigia, so we told them we could walk the 45 min walk with them.. Turned out they were there for a karate competition and were just going to be there for three days...

We asked where they were from and they said it was a paesino in Lazio (a little town in the province of Lazio) but that the girl had recently moved to Rome.. She happens to be living in my old area! (Backstory... I felt impressed to put Rome cards in my bag and told myself that that was crazy, so I didn't.. bad move.)

So we got to talking and she told me that she is a lawyer and she defends delinquents. She said that most people judge her for defending these kids who have committed pretty serious crimes in their lives.

But she said that she believes that everyone deserves to have a second chance: that even though they have made serious mistakes, they should be able to start over in their lives.

April 14, 2014

There aren't many people walking on the street.. so when we go out to do finding we literally talk to everyone because we could walk for hours without finding someone to talk to.

One of them was an optometrist who said he wasn't really interested in our message but gave us his number in case we had any eye problems. So I'm thinking about faking an eye injury just to call and set an appointment with him.

But one of our district goals is to remain positive. This Sunday the anziani made little bigliettinis that say "sorrìdi, ti fa bene" which means

"Smile, it's good for you!"

So I guess for a little update on my week other than finding: We are working with these two new converts named Giusi and Luigi.. they are realllly cute. They are about mid-forties and they are going to get married.

The only problem is that he has to find work (impossible) before they can get married because they are both still living with their parents... They are getting really down right now because he hasn't been able to find work, so they asked if they could meet with us two times a week because they need that spiritual uplift.

It was fun being in Catania because I got to do real finding... I met these cool girls from ARGENTINA and they are here playing field hockey... and we also met this really sweet Italian mom who took a Book of Mormon and said she wanted to read it and then give it to her friend.

With love from Siracusa (PLEASE don't call it Syracuse.. scifo)

April 23, 2014

(I make my companion do casa in sketchy places - candid photo)

Like the other morning we were doing finding... and there is no one on the streets and we are just walking and walking and we see a little market with a bunch of people, so I say to Sila Williams..

"Either we can walk AROUND the market where there are no people, or we can stroll THROUGH the market and do finding the Italian way...by just chatting with people."

So we decide to do things the Italian way and we head towards the market. I'm just so tired of stopping people, so I say a little prayer in my heart like

"Heavenly Father.. can someone just PLEASE stop US for a change."

and right as that phrase crosses through my brain I hear someone say, "SORELLE!!"

So we turn around and see this Middle Eastern shop keeper waving us down. We start to talk to him and he tells us how he has talked with the sisters before and how he loves talking about religion.

I'm thinking "THANK YOU, THANK YOU."

Then he says "You know it's my dream to marry an American girl..." and starts talking about how we are all so beautiful and blah blah blah..

and right then I hear "Ummm, excuse me.. do you speak Italian?" (in Italian obviously) and I say "Yes"

and he says "So this may sounds strange but I have this weird obsession with feet.. may I take a look at your feet?"

and I'm like umm yeah sure.. so I show him my foot and he is like "Okay, the next time we meet I will bring my camera so I can take a picture of your feet"...

She is from London and she looks like Kiera Knightly and I warned her ahead of time that sometimes when I am around English people, I start speaking with an English accent, but not on purpose. Things I inherited from my mother.

And we start fast walking to I don't know where and we walk up to this big piazza and there are a TON of tourists and a big water fountain and the bell tower is ringing and I had a sudden flashback to the scene in the Twilight movie when Bella goes to save Edward from the Volturi..

Then we got to the main piazza in Ortigia and I was so exhausted, I asked Sorella Williams if we could just sit down for a minute. So we find an open bench and I sat down and looked over to the man next to me and he said "*Oh hello there.. I'm sorry I didn't even recognize you.*" all in English.

I'm thinking, "Just go along with it" (because all the missionaries look the same to people so they think you are the same missionary who served there 5 years ago).

We started chatting in English and he says "*Oh you have to meet my friend here... You need to teach her about the gospel*" and right then his friend walks up and he tells her to come sit down next to us and is convincing her that she needs to meet with us..

THEN after they talked our ear off it was time to meet the other missionaries so we could all walk home because it's sketchy and dark

So we said our goodbyes and stood up to go when we hear another voice say "*Can I know two nice girls like you?*" in English.. which is an Italian phrase that doesn't translate well into English..

Sorella Williams starts talking to him and I introduce myself to the friend who doesn't seem nearly as excited about two American girls as the first guy. He asks which church we belong to..

Lastly.. we got to do Easter Italian style -- which is the best way to do Easter. They have Easter AND Pasquetta, which is a holiday the day AFTER Easter..

Yesterday we went to this member's villa out in the countryside in the middle of a giant vineyard.

They played bad Italian karaoke songs and one of the sisters in the ward pulled me up to dance with her and it was just a lot of fun.

p.s. SORRY I'm spending so much money. I have to travel for scambi every week, so it's expensive and I have to SEND my reimbursements to Rome instead of bringing them into the office, which means we have no money for food. So I've been pulling out of personal funds because all I can afford is pasta (and I'm trying to eat healthy food).

Also I forgot to explain the "witch doctor" in my title. Sorella Rossell has "doterra oils" and has been using them to fix all my ailments. Whenever I'm in pain, she says "*let me get my oils*" and they work, they really work.

It's good because I'm in a lot of pain, haha. My body is seriously messed up. When I get home

we are going to have to do a lot of doctors appointments haha. Don't be alarmed though, not that bad.

April 29, 2014

heading back to Rome (for a permesso and maybe a gelato)

The phrase "*the church is the same everywhere you go*" doesn't always apply to Sicilia, but we are seeing a lot of small miracles.

So the night before I had this image of a lady in her 40s, shorter than me, and standing by herself... not much to go by.. but that morning we were walking to the church from a less active's house and I saw her!

So I stopped her to ask her a question and the first thing she said was "*Hey, are you the Mormons who do that free English course? I've been wanting to come, but I wasn't sure how it worked*". So we stopped and chatted for a while and she said she is coming to English course tomorrow.

In English course we usually do some introductory questions.. This week was "What is your spirit animal?".. best question to ask the creepy Italian men that come to basic course... especially the Buddhist man with a bald head and a long rat tail.

So she came with me in the morning to go to an appointment with this sweet, old women with MS who is one of our eternal investigators named Anna Maria. We decided to teach the Restoration again and Naomi shared the part about the Book of Mormon. At the end I felt prompted to invite her to baptism, and she said YES!

...as long as she didn't have to do it naked. Yes, please keep your clothes on Anna Maria.

"I'd cut my head off for Saint Lucia" or

"Hey, are you selling drugs? ohh wait.. Jesus Christ! I'M SORRY I DIDN'T REALIZE" or just the plain old finger wag.

They showed some of the bible videos because a lot of them were filmed here in Sicilia and they used members from the ward as actors.

May 10, 2014

They had two flights trying to check in at the same time and all the people for Rome were about to miss their flight so they took down the lines to get the Rome people through which just ended up being a HUGE fight..

I may have done some pretty unchristian-like things.. but mostly I just followed all the other people yelling and it got me to the front and God answers prayers. I made it.

So on Sunday I had this image of a pregnant lady wearing a hot pink shirt with her husband who was wearing a shoulder bag.. super specific.. and I was thinking "*Wow that is REALLY specific, I don't know if I'll find them.*"

Then that night we were walking down the street and Sorella Williams and I stop at the same time and look at each other and we said "*IT'S THEM!*" because walking down the other side of the street was the couple.. exactly how I imagined them..

Anyway.. all of the hard things are usually made up for on Pday... because Siracusa is one of the most beautiful places ever.

Today we went on a boat tour of Ortigia and got to go inside some cool caves.

May 12, 2014

Stopped two old ladies on the street and they were headed to the hospital to see their mother who was in bad condition. They were waiting for one of their husbands to pick them up and we got to talk to them for a minute and give them some comforting words

Scambio in Ragusa.. welcomed at the station by a really drunk guy who kissed our hands and then grabbed my head to try and kiss me.. but because he was so drunk it was an easy dodge. When the sorelle came to pick us up with a member, the guy followed us to the car and tried to get in.

The member was so scared she took us to gelato to calm down. Not a scary drunk man, but she said she has never seen anyone like that in Ragusa her whole life. I believe it. Most tranquillo city ever.

We just attract all the crazies.

They don't have extra beds, so we broke the rules and tried to share the same twin beds pushed together.. Slla Rossell and I tried to share a pillow.. best friends.

Rest of our scambio in Ragusa. We did finding and walked to Ibla: the most beautiful city I've seen on my mission. look it up.

Talking about English course students, one of them asked me if I wanted him to scratch my arm with his creepy long thumb nail. I asked why he only kept his thumbnail long.. "work" he said.

I called every bus driver in Siracusa to see if anyone had found a red camera. no luck. But I made lots of new friends and all the bus drivers know me as the stupid American who got her camera stolen and thought someone would be nice enough to turn it in.

We taught Giusy and Luigi about eternal marriage. (You met them on Skype! Giusy is the lady who sat in the back and watched the whole time and Luigi is the man that tried to speak English to you.)

They are getting married but have to wait until he can get a job. The lesson turned into them talking about why they loved each other. so sweet.

One of the members referred us her friend from Romania who is going through a rough time. She invited us to go meet her in the park and we had a really sweet lesson and she said she wants to meet with us!

We are really hoping that she can get ready for her baptism at the end of the month. but she is still having a hard time quitting smoking.

So we turned around to talk to her and she started venting about all her problems and doubts because the bible has been changed and some churches change doctrines to fit with what they want and basically teaches US the apostasy..

May 20, 2014

We also went to a member's house for dinner, SO I wanted someone to roll me home after all the meal appointments this week #foodinsicilia

BUT because it was the last English course, our creepy English course students wrote Sila Rossell a song. It was so funny because they are so creepy and we got it all on video.. maybe one day I'll show you.

Wed we went to the Amadli's for lunch and we made homemade granita. Then the three missionaries had to leave for Catania and Vickers stayed with us in Siracusa..

We also went to this lady's, Silvana, house who is the other sisters' investigator and she is the textbook definition of a Sicilian woman: she force fed us cookies, spoke in dialect, and then slapped my behind on the way out the door.

Thursday we went to Anna Maria's, but she was smoking when we got there which was really sad because we have been working so hard on helping her to quit smoking.. so that lesson didn't go really well...

We did more appointments for the other sorelle, and on the way to English course we passed by a pesceria and saw a GIANT swordfish head...

So our wheels started turning and the sisters talked me into asking them how much it costs.. and they said they would give it to us for free... so after English course we were really sketchy and passed by the store with all the blinds closed..

They stuck their hand out the door and handed us a big black garbage bag that smelled SO bad and we walked back to our apartment so that the next day our ward mission leader could pass by and go stick it in the anziani's house before they got here... #welcometosiracusa

Friday we had a lesson with our new investigator, Adriana, from Romania and it went really well. She is so sweet and I think she is going to really make some great progress.

On the way home, Sorella Vickers waved at the police men.. it's a greenie thing: you still think it's okay to wave at everyone and say "Ciao," but really it's just asking for trouble.. or for free things..

luckily for us we got the second option.. because the police men came back and pulled over as we were talking to a Chinese man selling bonzai trees...

So the police man bought us all bonzai trees and we gave them copies of the Book of Mormon. Now the police man is trying to text Vickers and get at her. good luck, bud.

Then we did more finding in the afternoon. It was really funny because the best way to find people in Sicily is to just ask them random questions and then they open up and tell you about their whole lives.

So we met this man by the church and he started asking us the difference between our church and his. We teach him the Restoration and he goes,

"Okay I get it.. you are like Catholics, but not practicing.."

and I'm like "Ummm, no it's the opposite.. we are practicing, non-Catholics."

and he is like, "Okay I get it.. you guys are like part of the Catholic church but you don't practice the church."

and I'm like, "*Nope. The other way around.*" So that's what people in sicily think missionaries are: non-practicing Catholics. He also told me that I should marry a Sicilian man. bad idea. not happening.

Sicily is so beautiful and the people are incredible. Even though most people reject us, I see miracles every day and there is nothing I love more than just bearing my testimony to people.

May 28, 2014

Things aren't progressing so well for Anna Maria.. she is still having a really hard time quitting smoking. We have her on a program right now to help her, but her son has been in and out of the hospital, so it makes her really nervous and she picks up smoking.

So this week when we went over I asked if I could give her dog a bath.. she said yes, but the bidonte (caretaker?) said no.. but I begggggged Ghadi (the caretaker) and she said I could...

So we gave her dog Carlotta a bath and I cut off all her hair because it was really long and gross and she couldn't see anything...

I realized I'm not a very good dog groomer, but Anna loved it. Her daughter called while we were there and she said that Carlotta looked like a "principessina"..

Everyone in Sicilia is really nice and really open to talk, but even people who have doubts about their faith or believe their church is corrupt still don't want to meet with us. It's a lot about tradition here.

We met a lot of cool people this week. This one girl from Poland kept us for like an HOUR on the street talking to her.. or more just like listening to her talk.

I'm just learning to appreciate the little things that I love about Siracusa.. There is so much character here.

Like today we were walking to the church and we talked to this old man who invited us to his house for water and to meet his whole family.. almost everyone is like that here.

I'm learning a lot my last few transfers.. I'm really happy to be here in Siracusa, its duro (*hard*)... but It's beautiful and we have a good district.

Also, I met a cute family from Buenos Aires in Ortigia the other day.. We do an "hour of power" where all the missionaries go to Ortigia for an hour to do finding and then meet back up at the end. We bring copies of the Book of Mormon in every language because there are so many tourists.

Anyway, we found this cute family and I told them that my parents served in Argentina.. meno male they spoke Italian because all I remember in Spanish is "*Can I go to the bathroom?*" and "*church*," so whenever I find people that only speak Spanish I give them a mormon.org card and say "*church*" and send them on their way.

June 3, 2014

So Wednesday night we took a bus to Catania to meet Sorella Stephens, the other STL, so we could travel to Messina the next morning. So Sorella Williams wanted to leave earlier to Catania because she is scared of doing anything in the dark..

But I didn't want to waste all day traveling, so we got to Catania at like 8:30 and still had to wait at the super sketchy bus station for another bus to take us to their house.

I pretended not to be afraid because I didn't like admitting that she was right and we should have left earlier, but there were all these crazy people running around and they were like trying to wave down buses for us and stuff.

Anyway, on the way to their house we met this 22 year old guy and he said that the sisters had knocked on his door just that week, but he didn't let them in..So we had a chance to explain to him a little about the restoration and he gave us his information because he wanted to know more!

Every time I go I tell myself how I want to serve there because it feels like EVERYONE we talk to is super prepared and willing to listen. And they live above the Armani store... but that doesn't have anything to do with it.

So I was really excited to be with Sorella Wiltbank again and we had SO many miracles. First we were walking home for lunch and we saw these two Italian guys having a really intense

conversation, which is pretty typical.. but as we walked by, the older man pulled us aside and he tells his friend to look into our eyes. He says,
 “Look at the peace and happiness in their eyes; it's because of Jesus Christ.”
 and I'm thinking “Yeah, look into my eyes, but please don't notice the shock in them.”
 So he goes on to convince this guy that he needs to meet with us because we can give him the happiness we have in our eyes.. and the other guy is just staring into our eyes and he is like,
 “Yeah, you're right, they do have a light in their eyes... Look into my eyes; I have sad eyes.”

We passed by two ladies sitting outside of a bar (K: “bars” are little counter cafes in Italy.) and we stopped them and asked them if they would be interested in our English course. One lady said “yes” and that she is going to come.

We started walking away when we both felt impressed to turn back and keep talking to her.. which would be really awkward, but we are both used to being awkward so we did it and I invited her to church on Sunday. She says “*Wait, are you Mormon?*” We say “yes,” and she replies “*I'm Catholic, but I've always wanted to know the differences in our beliefs.*”

So as we are talking about it and laughing about the magic we have when we serve together, a car pulls up to the corner where we are standing and waiting for the light to turn so we can pass.. This car lets out a young Italian girl and she turns to us and starts talking to us and right away she asks US if she can give us her number and address so we can come to her house one day to talk... my jaw is literally on the FLOOR and we exchange numbers and explain who we are and why we are here and she was just so excited to have us come over.

At this point I've decided that I'm not ever leaving Messina... and we keep walking home and the other sisters are wondering why we are late because we are stopping and talking to everyone.

Then we run into this tourist couple and they ask us where they can get pizza and we start walking with them and to show them a place where they can get pizza. They start to walk away... so I run after them to give them a mormon.org card and they say “*Oh you are Mormon?... Our neighbors in (some obscure town in Denmark) are Mormons.. They are going to pick up their son who was been in South Africa for 2 years.*”

Who has Mormon neighbors in Denmark?

Anyway, they said they are going to go home and tell their neighbors that they met the Mormon missionaries in Italy. Cool stuff.

Speaking of prepared people here.. we had a really great experience with Adrianna this week. She is our (only) investigator from Romania. She invited us over on Friday to have some Romanian dish.. We all crammed into their cute Italian kitchen and we were eating Romanian sugar donuts with her, her roommate that only speaks Romanian, and Maria (her friend that's a member).

It was such a miracle. She just sat there in shock and we talked to her about how it wasn't a coincidence that they called while we were talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was such a beautiful lesson... The only problem is that for right now they are having her work every day for 8 hours... so she couldn't come to church on Sunday.. so that is the next hurdle that we are working on.

June 9, 2014

Also it's hard to think because these loud Italian ragazzi are yelllllling behind me.

June 17, 2014

Also, we had a lesson with Alsessandra! One of our English course students. She is one of my favorite students.. we always have really good conversations whenever we chat. She told me that she had really bad impressions of the church before, but since she has been coming and hearing our spiritual thoughts she has realized that we aren't like everything she has heard.

Wednesday we felt impressed to go stop by a member's house, but they live WAY out of town... like over an hour on foot and it's like a million degrees right now and Sorella Williams hates the heat more than anything.. so she was not excited when I called this family and they said that we could come if we could make it in an hour.

So we got their information, on the way back we decided to stop at a less active's house and she lets us in and said, "*We were just about to sit to dinner, would you like to stay?*"

and I say "*No no no, we still have to get home on time.*"

... but you just can't say no to Italians for dinner so she made us stay promising it would only be ten minutes and then she would give us a ride home... which turned into 2 hours of dinner (which actually hadn't been cooked yet) salad, bread, then gelato... but that's just how it is.

So the anziani are calling us at 10 and are like "*Ummm where are you guys?*" and the members are like "*Just pass the phone to us.. WE will tell them its our fault*" haha I LOVE Italians.

Thursday we took a bus for 3 hours to RAGUSA for a scambio. Ragusa is like the promised land. I love it there. We met a cute Australian girl on the bus and she just came to Italy on holiday for fun by herself and she is staying on a farm outside of Ragusa and I want to be her when I get home - just travel the world.

Friday we headed back and I met this guy from the YEMEN who told me his whole story of how he had crazy dreams about Jesus and decided to convert to Christianity. Then his family tried to kill him and his best friend was killed while they were both trying to escape and he got baptized in Ghana.

Now he is in Italy and trying to learn Italian and he showed me the huge scars from where they stabbed him. SO crazy. He is going to get baptized too. He said he wants to come to church.

I love Italy because I Love Italians and I love teaching Italians because you can just be so HONEST with them.

Also they hate air conditioning.. literally this week 2 members told me they were allergic to air conditioning.

I DON'T GET IT. It's so hot.

Also they take everything as a "sign." We are meeting with this sweet member, Giusy, and she is really sad because she and her fiancé can't get married until he finds a job, but they are both getting older and she wants kids.

She comes to our appointment and we are in the middle of the lesson when she pulls out a stuffed animal and says "*Sorella, what does it mean?*"

and I'm like, "*Uhh that some sad kid dropped his toy?*"

and she is like "*I think God is trying to tell me something.*"

Then she got called to serve in the Primary on Sunday.. maybe she was right?

Also I love Italian church because Fratello Conforto plays the piano cool, Rosario periodically hands me candy from different pockets in his camper vest during Sacrament Meeting, moms breastfeed in church, no one wants to turn the a/c on, everyone shares their stories about when they saw Jesus, and the simps (that come) love it.

I LOVE ITALY. The closer I get to coming home the more I get emotional about how much I love Italy, Italians, and the culture. I'm really going to miss it here. I'm really trying to enjoy every minute of it while I'm here, so that when I get home I can feel satisfied with all that I did and be at peace moving on to later phases of my life.

June 24, 2014

We had a really busy week this week. I love busy weeks. Also I lovvvve Siracusa. & I'm realllly happy because I get to finish my mission in Siracusa.

We had 4 member appointments this week, which we were excited about.

We got the same meal for three of them and it reminded me of when the sister missionaries in California told us they once got lasagna for every meal for a whole week. In the summer everyone eats pasta salad with an mixture of whatever they have... peas, corn, hot dogs, tuna, pickles, peppers, olives, eggs, eggplant, and other things that I don't remember.

The Italian saints are so incredible.

Whatever it is, it makes me walk like the old Sicilian ladies with their hunched backs and potato bodies... It was funny the first couple of days, but now it's getting pretty old not being able to walk or sit for very long without it hurting.

We had an incredible lesson with Alessandra, from English course. I love love love her. I feel like she is who I would be like if I weren't a member of the church, so I get really excited to talk with her because we think very similarly.

We also went to go visit another member for lunch who lives outside of Siracusa. She doesn't get many missionaries over because they live so far away and we have to take a long bus ride to get out there.

We have been trying to see her for the last two transfers, but it's hard to sacrifice so much time out of missionary work. Since the other sisters were probably leaving this week, we got ourselves together and found a way to go out there, spend two and a half hours with them for lunch, and then catch a bus back.

Well it was bad planning on our part, because we KNOW that you just can't do a lunch appointment in 2 and a half hours in Italy. Even though President made a one hour rule and we TRY SO HARD to do it in an hour.. you just can't tell Sicilians that you have only one hour to eat.

So we go out there early in the morning, planning to do some less active finding, after which we find out the less active living there is dead..

While we are wandering around this town, we find an archeological site (not uncommon to find in any city you go to) so we decide to stop in while we are waiting for Sorella Papa to come get us for lunch.

We started asking the one other person in the park about what the ruins were and we found out they are greek temples/alters from 80 BC...

After about 20 min Sorella Papa comes to get us and then she finds out we can only stay for 2 hours and she gets really mad because she hasn't even started cooking and she thought we weren't going to be leaving until 5:00.

But we had an activity at church at 6:00 and all our investigators were coming... so she is cooking and we are talking to the daughter and playing with their puppies and she starts making us chicken and we sit to eat and she says,

"There is no way you are making it to the 2:20 bus, you are just going to have to wait until 5:00."

So we are FREAKING out... trying to find another member or anyone to come get us and we find out there is another bus in the town nearby that has a bus leaving at 2:40 and so we are stuffing pasta and eggplant and chicken down our throats as fast as we can and I ask if we can share a spiritual thought and the husband says,

"Sister, you have 2 minutes or you are going to miss the bus"

So I'm reading as fast as I can in Italian and we say amen and we run to the car.

Sorella Papa was driving probably 90 miles an hour down this tiny Italian street trying to pass people up, honking at them to get us to the bus stop in the next city.

Then I hear her yell *"THERE IS THE BUS!"* and there it is... coming down the mountain ahead of us, so she hits the gas and says *"WE CAN MAKE IT!"* and she catches up to the bus and passes it up and we are all screaming and.. well.. we made it.. and Sorella Papa earned herself brownies every Sunday for the next six weeks.

The activity in church WAS SUPPOSED to be watching "The Other Side of Heaven" but the GAME (*World Cup*) was on.. so everyone came to the game and no one brought the movie and the missionaries aren't allowed to watch the game even though we begged President...

Knowing that I leave soon has made me appreciate the little things I love about Italy so much more..

...like the old man at the ward party explaining to me in detail how you make tomato sauce, and how much I love talking to people in Italian... every little thing just seems so much sweeter.

That night we had an appointment with Giusi and Luigi who are some of my favorite people.. Luigi found a job, so they are hoping to get married sometime in December!

Then we saw Anna Maria.. Sorella Williams was laughing at me because even though Anna Maria has MS, she always says "*sto meglio di voi*" meaning that she is healthier than us...

Then when Anna asked me to get her a glass of water, I stood up and was all crouched over and walking weird because of my back and Anna was standing up walking better than me. She still isn't making much progress as far as quitting smoking goes... but she is so sincere in her desire to get baptized..

It's the first time we have been able to get an investigator in church for such a long time. They loved it a lot.. other then Enza felt sick because the air conditioner was on tooo high... but everyone came to greet them and it was a good Sunday.

Afterwards we had another meal appointment with everyone because at least one missionary from each companionship is leaving. We said goodbye to Smith because he flies home tomorrow..

Sunday night we had no appointments so we did finding in Ortigia and met some really cool people. Lot's of pretty people in Ortigia because that's where the rich Italians live. There was also a little festival with a street all covered in flowers... it was really pretty. The perks of serving in Italy.

Then they offered to drive us home. I told them we were there with a message about eternal families and asked if we could meet up again... They wouldn't give me their information but they said they would call us.. which almost never happens.. but sometimes it does, so there is still hope.. but at least we got a ride home, right?

Today we spent Sorella William's last pday in Ortigia.. my favorite part of the city. I took my film camera and I talked to all the cool shop owners while Williams souvenir shopped.

June 30, 2014

We got a pamphlet about exorcisms in our mailbox from one of the local churches, haha. We decided to add that to our list of finding tools in PMG.

-Two italian opera singers/simps sang goodbye to Sorella Vickers in our chapel and I cried.

-Italy is out of the World Cup and we are all sad about it.

-I got hugged by an African man at the train stop in Catania and all the anziani saw and they won't let me live it down.

-One of my favorite members made us a lasagna and then drove us all the way to Catania to drop off Sorella Vickers AND downloaded all of the "Frozen" songs for us in Italian.

-Then we had a great ward party and all our contacts and almost all of our investigators came. We did a photo scavenger hunt and it was a lot of fun.. It was 'I Colori di Brasile' or 'The Colors of Brazil'.

TAIWAN:

November 4, 2013 Some of my concerns are that every Sunday I look to see how many people attend sacrament services and honestly I have been thinking, especially as I do more prayers and reflections, that we should be focused more on strengthening our existing members. To help make my case - an example - one of our less active members has, for about the past month, been coming to church regularly, attending all the meetings, connecting with the full time missionaries, and helping us teach and go on splits when we have these extra lessons. He told us this Sunday he now has his interview to receive the Aaronic priesthood. There is one other new priesthood holder who is on the path to becoming a Melchizedek priesthood holder. I believe that is really to the key to everything in "building" the kingdom and expanding the faith and blessings of the people in this area. Of course what I am writing is probably all xie du (blaspheme), but these are just my thoughts. The branch technically has over 200 members but only around 50 come on the Sabbath so this is why I feel we should really be focused on strengthening from within.

Hope everything back home is good, and just think of me at Thanksgiving, with no mashed potatoes, or cheese. Our local ward is trying to do a thanksgiving party - everyone here seems to love US culture, but the food is always Asian based - always - so I hope to experience Thanksgiving like in the movie "A Christmas Story" - and hope the "turkey" is not smiling at me :) You asked what you could send me - does chocolate count as necessity? Pretty sure mom thinks it does...so anything chocolate would be great! You also asked why my bike looks so horrible - it's supposed to look horrible so it doesn't get stolen!

November 10, 2013

Crazy thought though that I might be leaving Taidong soon but only the Lord knows, but still this is all I know of missionary life in the field and I've come to really love the people we work with. The picture with the 'snail trail' is after an impromptu service project we worked on, and I think he was hitching a ride because it was too wet for him as well. The other photo is from a place called Sam's Burger. The one I ordered is called the "Big Hungry Now" it is three beef patties and six strips of bacon - yes my pants still fit!

November 18, 2013

I crashed on my bike pretty bad this week! I'm OK just some scrapes and bruises. My bike tried to change gears on me while I was standing up to pedal harder, it like skipped and jumped through a couple of gear changes and I lost complete balance and went down. I'm fine and no cars nearby but maybe another reason to pray for me to stay in Taidong, or at least not to transfer to super busy Taipei. The photo of the plunger is because our kitchen flooded this past week. So I had to 'borrow' it from the church building as our apartment doesn't have one. Our apartment has so much charm, it's the only residence in the mission with 6 elders, and I really love it - yet another reason not wanting to leave. we had ours here this past week. Just letting you know the

church is true, because it's the same everywhere, especially primary. Don't have to speak Mandarin to pick up what the music and the youth talks were getting across. It was really adorable and made me miss all the primary programs I made it through back home. The baptism was a little crazy though. His Mom was crying and we had to share the baptismal service with the other branch, I had to say the ordinance a second time because hey it's my second language and I was a little nervous. He was super hungry so he kept sneaking off to eat super messy curry AFTER HE WAS IN HIS WHITE clothing, and after getting baptized he tried to swim in the font - it was a little hectic but hey he and his family are really committed to the gospel.

November 24, 2013

I was shipped off elsewhere, I'll let you make your guesses! I'll give you a hint, I'm not on the east coast anymore, so that rules out Hualian and Yuli. I'm as far west and south in the mission.

I am in....

Miao Li! sat on a train for like 8-9 hours and am literally right on the border of the Taizhong mission. I joke that President Day doesn't want to see me, so he keeps sending me to the outskirts of the mission, that or I am secretly a Taizhong missionary.

I already love it here though! the members are super nice! One of them has the same last name (Chinese) as me! My mission given name is super rare so that is really cool to have another Ding in my home ward.

Our branch had a thanksgiving day party in Taidong right before transfers. I don't know why but we seem to celebrate holidays like 5 weeks early, so yeah I have been super confused, plus the weather doesn't change here, so it is really throwing me off.

Had some turkey and they also had mashed potatoes. I am definitely missing the US every time we try to celebrate our holidays.

December 2, 2013

Sorry I forgot to bring my camera to the internet café' this morning...haha long story of a sleepy companion, and me forgetting from being tired of waking up all night thinking I was going to vomit (no worries I didn't, just an over zealous Sister in the ward made us way too much food, and every time we would stop eating she would say (hai mei chi wan le!) meaning there was still food there to eat. oh man I felt so so sick...)

Miao li is as far west and south as you can get from Taipei, so once again I have to wait for someone to be going to the mission office so they can bring back our mail. Two people went the beginning of this week, so I guess your packages haven't come yet. I will get to go to the office on the 14th, so at the latest that is when I will get them. Thank you so much for sending whatever are in the boxes through! Chocolate here is really expensive, and after moving all my stuff and myself - I think I traveled as far possible in the mission - it cost a lot of money for trains and transfers, plus I like to save my money for like...food haha

Oh man I miss Christmas so much! Its actually pretty chilly here right now though - well like 50 degrees, but super wet and super windy - doesn't add up to happy missionaries or happy Taiwanese. I really wish I could watch Christmas movies though - no one here celebrates

Christmas - even the members are like "eh" about it. I'll send pictures of everything soon, as far as pictures of the apartment I don't know if I can, just like I'm not allowed to tell you the address. I'll find out.

My Thanksgiving was....well non-existent as most USA holidays are here.

and then remember I am also on a missionary budget. So when I get back home like everything is going to be super nice. USA has a waaaaay higher than average standard of living. Though like every single person here has iPhones - even if they don't have running water - so I guess that was their choice. I hope my family will all come back and visit after I return and I can show you all around, don't worry though, it isn't too gross as long as you BYO-TP.

December 9, 2013

snow...I miss snow...though it is still warm here so I can't really complain..

Yes "Lee Meow" is how Miaoli sounds - thanks for setting the bar higher! I haven't heard of the flying cow ranch, but I'll ask around.

Taidong does have a lot of yuan zhu min (native) people there. They are pretty cool, kind of strange clothes, amazing rituals, some of the folks there are really scary and carry pointy sticks and knives everywhere they go. Their food is a lot like Hawaiian food.

December 30, 2013The Taiwan member that let me use his laptop to communicate with you is Zhu Di Xiong. He just came back from his mission. He is super nice and a strong member. I know you guys want to send him something to say thanks and I tried to hit him up and see if there is anything he would want from the USA, but he caught on pretty quick to what I was doing and shied away...I'll think of something.

So you guys overheard me talking with Zhu and you were impressed with my language skills - that's only because he speaks really slow so I can keep up :) Yes the language is...still coming. But I think about where I was 6 months ago, and well its improving so that is the goal right?

This week was certainly interesting. Our English class is down to just a few people and our service projects have slowed way down too - so I guess we have lots of time trying to find people. Anyways we still are working very hard. I seem to have a collection of badges now...changes in the format throughout the mission...I prefer the bi-lingual ones at the top and I think these are the ones we'll stick with.

January 6, 2014

Oh wow it sounds so cold there! pretty much the same here like 15-17 degrees...Celsius ha ha. Nice that it hasn't been as rainy recently which is really starting to feel like a decent spring! New years for Miao li... president day said we could celebrate!!...in bed...with our eyes closed. The folks here acknowledge that it is a new year, but the big thing here is Chinese new year. I hear it is pretty epic...like Taiwan basically shuts down....

Yes Miao li has lots of Ke jia (hakka) stuff. It's a little strange because back in Taidong I was picking up more taiyu (other aboriginal group). So now I know like all three languages. but I understand when people say that hakka language sounds pretty harsh. The food is okay, nothing really to rave about. Its pretty much the same. Your only choice is rice or noodles really...

This week was certainly interesting lots and lots of finding more people that want to learn English and inviting them to our classes. We did have one lady who we thought was a little crazy come to class and then show-up at church, but turns out she is just eccentric. We followed-up and invited her to come to family home evening at a

members house. We knew she should be able to play piano, so we asked her to help the evening by playing a hymn. Her first time reading the music for "Be Still My Soul", and she turned it into a concert level performance - like adding her own flurries and side threads, the members just looked at us with their jaws dropped. It was really cool. she's really good at piano. so we are going to keep meeting with her and see what happens!

Today we plan to go to a kaorou chi dao bao. (bbq buffet(chi = eat Dao = too bao=full)). We also found a place here that has a 72 oz. steak challenge like the one in Texas. We're going to tackle it as a district at the end of the next transfer.

January 20, 2014

The reason why I keep bringing up my acne is because in Taiwan, within 1 minute of talking to me, the Taiwanese person starts talking to me about how bad my acne is. I'm used to it now, the culture is rather blunt, but they talk about it lots - well at least they speak to me :)

We have been 'invited' to do this when we introduce ourselves - touch our name tags and let the person know our purpose! It has been a crazy challenge, and really scary at times, but it's actually been working. Lots of people quickly steer clear of us but we know if they don't run away when they read what our badge says that they probably actually have interest in why we are here - weird - but seems to work! So we are all to remember to be bold in what we do and everything else takes care of itself! The Spirit rules!

March 3, 2014

Thanks for sending the acne stuff, but no guarantees. With all the stress, sweat, oily food, and lack of time, it'll have a lot to fight against. If all else fails, we can just nuke it when we get back. People here are either hot or cold - no in between, either they want to hear about our Lord and Savior or they do not makes it easier to figure out where to spend your time and His.

April 2, 2014

So the Asian face. we call it here "bu hao yi si" basically means they are too polite and nice to tell you they don't want anything to do with religion. So you'll be meeting with folks for a month before they finally tell you they like bai bai -ing (worshiping ancestors). Honestly the whole family thing is kind of used as an excuse. They try to make it a big deal so you think they would love the whole forever families doctrine right? nope. They go for the "no other success can compensate for the failure at home". Most people just do it out of tradition. They don't know why, they just do it, and life seems good enough for them. They have food so they are happy (or think they are). Honestly as far as teaching them I just talk to everyone and whoever will listen I keep going. So we may see more rejection, but the people that don't run away, or yell at us in Taiwanese, stick around and are actually good investigators. So that's pretty much what I and the whole mission are doing besides teaching English.

Nothing too new on my end. Its warm here. Like the summer is going to be rough. I was already sweating and dying and its only spring. The name of the game now is to not have yellow shirts by the end of august. Don't worry I'm washing them frequently!

Here is nice, this week is supposed to be sunny and 80's! which actually stinks with dark pants on...but seems that spring is here, and summer is coming fast! and its probably going to be a hot one. Got me a 2L bottle so I don't get dehydrated.

Thanks for asking but you really don't have to send an Easter package! My birthday and Easter are super close so just do one package if you must. Though if a package is coming, can you please send my electric shaver (and power cord)? It'd save me lots of time...and pain.

June 26, 2014

Other than that nothing new... Same old same old. Feels weird I will have been gone for a year this week. Definitely hit my mid life crisis. I'm now an "older missionary". Feels weird I'm on the down hill slope of things now - the language is second nature now and it's true what others say - I even dream in Chinese.